

Carl Jacobi **THE TOMB** **FROM BEYOND**



Panther

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SATANIC RAT

A quarter of an hour snailed by. I wiped a bead of perspiration from my forehead. Ten minutes more. And then we heard it!

From the outer corridor came the padding of approaching feet. Toward the laboratory door they came.

The door opened wide. A scream of horror mounted unsounded to my lips. What I saw I will never forget. A shapeless gray body with a rectangular head crouched there, eyes gleamingly hellishly.

For a split second the five of us remained motionless with horror. Then riving the silence came Jane's shriek followed by a deafening roar from the policeman's revolver. The rat braced itself and leaped into the room.

'The light!' I cried. 'The white light.'

Then that beam of light swept across the room and centred full on the thing; livid under the ghastly ray, its head twisted around, eyes twin globules of hate. With a mewling cry of rage it made for the door.

'After it!' I shouted . . .

Also by Carl Jacobi

Revelations in Black

Carl Jacobi

The Tomb from Beyond

Panther

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THE TOMB FROM BEYOND

It was in late September, while in the employ of Payne, Largarten and Company, land agents, Boston, that I first came into that district known as the Opal Lake country. The thirty-five miles from Pine Island to Flume I had found necessary to travel by car, no trains making the run on the inland spur for the past six years, or since the cessation of the lumbering industry.

I was tired from a two-day trip and six-hour ride on the jerking, creeping local, and my spirits fell even lower as I sat hunched back in the rear seat of the old Ford and surveyed the forlorn aspect of the region that stretched away on all sides.

I was aware that my destination was one of those depressing oddities that one finds occasionally in the wake of American enthusiasm – a deserted town. But if the conclusion to my trip was to be an inglorious one, the approach was no less depressing. The spent day was chilly and gloomy, a raw wind whining past the windshield from the north, and the tortuous road, unrepaired since its years of unuse, wound in and out through a gaunt graveyard of second growth. To the side, fallen in various angles of despair, stumbled the rotting poles of the abandoned telegraph line, the wires dangling in ensnarled coils like some gigantic grape-vine withered in decay.

Nor was the somberness of my trip made any more pleasant by the personality of my driver. A stolid and taciturn Finn, he answered my questions with nods or unintelligible gutturals around the stem of his pipe and confined his entire attention to the uneven way ahead.

It was when we had reached a higher eminence, a point where the road mounted an old terminal moraine, that I, sweeping my gaze below me, remarked to the driver:

‘Opal lake, eh?’

He grunted an agreement, and I stared down upon that perfect circle embedded there in the growth. Farther on, near the

point where I judged the abandoned town of Flume to be, was a much smaller lake, this one curiously in the shape of a half moon.

'And the other . . . ?' I asked, looking up once more. 'The little lake off to the right . . . what is it called?'

The driver drew on his pipe, and a cloud of blue smoke, strong with perique, swirled back into my face. Somehow I got the impression that my question had disturbed him. He turned, glanced down at the crescent-shaped strip of water, and his lips tightened.

'That isn't a lake,' he said shortly.

The man wasn't joking. As I reached for a cigarette and cupped my hands around the match, I was about to reply that my vision, in spite of a need for reading glasses, was still unimpaired. But at that moment, the car struck a deep gash in the road, tilted sharply, and I was forced to clutch hard to keep from being thrown from the seat. When the road had resumed a comparatively even plane again, the thought had passed on.

Nightfall had gathered upon us when half an hour later we swept around a curve and drove into the empty street of Flume. It was here, according to our correspondence arrangement, that I was to meet my client, Julian Trenard. For a moment, as we drove slowly forward, I thought he had forgotten about it. Then we came abreast of the boarded-up building that had once housed the town's furniture store, and I saw him.

In the gloom he seemed at first only a blacker shadow standing there motionless, hands hanging at his sides. He was tall, and his height was even more accentuated by the long black rain-poncho that draped loosely from his shoulders. He gave no sign of recognition as we clattered to a halt before him, until I climbed out of the car and stepped forward.

'Are you Mr Trenard?' I asked hesitatingly.

My voice sent a visible shock through him, and he started to attention abruptly as though he had been immersed in his thoughts.

'I'm Arnold,' I continued, 'John Arnold of Payne, Largarten and Company. You received my letter?'

'Yes.' He nodded slowly and after a moment extended his hand. 'You may dismiss your driver, Arnold. It is only a short distance to my place, and we can talk as we walk.'

The fact that he neither wished me welcome nor expressed a thankfulness that I had come, even as a matter of courtesy, took me a bit aback, and I stood studying the man in silence. In the gathering darkness, the evidences of years spent under a tropical sun were clearly apparent. He stood noticeably erect, shoulders wide and square, marking, it seemed, a man of determination and strength. Yet the left side of his lips twitched constantly, and there was a furtive stare in his eyes that suggested fear.

I paid the driver, who, still in silence, handed out my grip-sack, then whirled the car around in the center of the street and raced off in the direction from which he had come.

'There are two roads,' Trenard said abruptly, after the driver had gone, 'one skirting the lake and a shorter one through the woods. Which do you prefer?'

'There is a lake, then?' I asked, remembering the queer remark of the driver.

For a moment Trenard made no answer. He stared straight ahead of him and walked forward a couple of paces. 'A lake, yes,' he said slowly.

We reached the edge of town and entered the remnants of an old logging road, merely two ruts in most places, necessitating my walking on one side and Trenard four feet away on the other. The man gave no indication of commencing that conversation which he had declared the march to his house would permit, and we paced along in silence.

It was quite dark now, the way before us walled in by two lines of towering trees. Up above, thick velvet clouds swept across the low-hanging sky, but off to the east, a growing circle of radiance showed where the moon was trying to break through.

As the man continued to say nothing and I could think of nothing worthy of disturbing his study, I fell into a deep thought myself, musing on all his colorful history which had so intrigued the world a year before.

Here, then, was the leader of that epoch-making Trenard-Fielding expedition, which, in the face of all scientific ridicule, had discovered off the coast of British North Borneo, the remnants of a hitherto unknown civilization: the unchronicled, unfabled city of Dras. I remembered the lengthy newspaper

accounts that had been devoted to the finding of the submerged city and the queer artifacts brought back to New York. Down there on the sea floor, Trenard had walked the streets of a city buried under water for centuries. He had found marble buildings, architecture unaffected by Roman or Arab invasion, statues of deities of a distinct and separate religion, and carven hieroglyphics that were as yet undecipherable. It was indeed a success.

But Fielding had not fared so well. His sudden death had been a shock to the entire country, and especially to his colleagues back in the University of Virginia. There were queer rumors about his being killed by some unseen sea monster which lurked there in the depths, rumors that had been partially verified by other members of the expedition, but in all cases stoutly denied by Trenard.

In the exact center of the water-covered city, according to Trenard's popular book, *The Mysteries of Sunken Dras*, which I had browsed through, he had found a large mausoleum where apparently were entombed the five kings of the last dynasty. And for some reason, Trenard had been so taken up by either the architectural beauty or the regal associations of this edifice, that he had raised it to the surface, segment by segment, and shipped it back to the United States. It was a tremendous undertaking, involving the use of costly derricks and equipment and endangering the lives of the men. Why Trenard should have chosen this one building to raise rather than the many others, and why indeed he should have sacrificed further exploration and the removal of other objects to raise any at all, was, to the popular mind, a mystery.

It was said, of course, that the touch of fever, which had delayed him for three weeks at Kuching on the west coast of Borneo, had left his mind unbalanced. It was said also that the radiogram which had come to him out there in the Java sea, telling of the sudden death of his sister, Sylvia, had left him half mad and brought about a strange obsession.

At any rate, Trenard had taken the mausoleum back with him to New York. Then at further expense, he had conveyed it by train and motor truck to his wilderness home near the town of Flume. That was a year ago.

Flume at that time was only a monument of past industry.

Only some seventy-five persons remained in the village. But I had heard or read somewhere that three months after the mausoleum had been set up in the town's cemetery and the body of his deceased sister, Sylvia, entombed in it, every one of those seventy-five had packed up and left *en masse*.

My reverie suddenly came to an end, when Trenard, grasping my arm, spoke for the first time in many moments.

'The road forks here. Let us take the wood path. The lake road is considerably longer.'

I nodded in agreement, and increased my pace to keep up with him. Abruptly, the way before us opened upon a large glade, and there, fifty yards ahead, loomed the walls of a huge, oblong house. I stared at it coldly. Even in the half-darkness, the simple, the severe style of its architecture was apparent. The building, though frame, had not the slightest suggestion of gable or ornamentation, and rose straight up and across like an enormous packing case.

Trenard led the way to a small door, unlatched it with a key, and ushered me inside.

To the interior decorator, I presume, that chamber would have appealed as being furnished in good taste. But to me, depressed already by the somberness of my passage through the September woods, it seemed even more austere than the building's outside.

The white walls ran up two stories to an arched ceiling of a sickly-hued blue. On the side opposite me, halfway up, extended a small gallery swerving out over the room in a wide curve and terminating in a steep staircase, the balustrade fashioned of polished silver. There was a white porcelain book-case in one corner, and on its top stood two curious ebony figures. One was in the likeness of a large deep-sea fish, with huge scales and a bloated middle portion. The other, complete in every detail, was a carving of a diver with helmet and full equipment. All in all, the room gave the impression of utter coldness, and my eyes moved from side to side, searching for a bit of red or brown to break the frigid monotony.

Trenard had removed his hat and coat now. He moved toward a connecting door, saying:

'Make yourself comfortable for a few moments, Arnold. I'll

get you a little refreshment. I have no servants. I've lived here alone since the death of my sister, you know.'

Before I could explain that I had eaten heartily in Pine Island, he had gone, and I was left to my thoughts.

I stood there a moment musing over the strange ways a man's ornamental fancies will manifest themselves. Then, lighting a cigarette, I tossed my hat and coat on to a chair and strolled over to the bookcase. There were the volumes I had expected to find; atlases, travel accounts, texts on deep-sea diving. Wallace's *Malay Archipelago*, and one or two technical works on ancient civilizations. But my attention was attracted abruptly from the book-shelves to a large framed picture hanging on the white wall.

It was an enlarged photograph, a scene taken under water by a submerged camera. It presented, I realized instantly, a street view of the sunken city of Dras. Vaguely, through the blur of the water and under the glare of what apparently was the submarine's beam light, had been snapped a formless mass of ornate buildings, shadowy columns and capitals. It was indistinct, yet that very lack of line and boundary increased its mystery and appeal. In the foreground could be distinguished a school of fish, and at a point in the rear, above the city, hung a black shapeless mass, which apparently had failed to register in the lens of the camera.

Toward this latter object I suddenly found my gaze attracted. For an instant I stood there wondering what could have caused this blotch on an otherwise almost incredibly perfect photograph. Then slowly there came a singular sensation that my eyes were being held in focus, that another will stronger than my own would not permit them to turn away. It was inexplicable, that feeling. It seemed as though some hidden eye were looking from beneath that discoloration on the print, gazing at me with the controlling stare of a hypnotist.

A moment later, I thought that formless shadow had begun to move – to creep slowly toward me with the sluggish wavering movement of a heavy body in deep water.

Heavy steps and a slamming door broke the spell abruptly, and I turned to meet Trenard approaching with a tray of china. He sat across from me, lit an old meerchaum pipe and proceeded to lose himself amid clouds of tobacco smoke.

'Mr Trenard,' I said at length, my repast finished, 'if we can agree on one subject, that of price, I believe my business may be concluded here with as little trouble and as quickly as possible. We have found a potential purchaser of your property. You must realize, however, that because of the inconveniences caused by the abandonment of the town of Flume, you cannot command a very high price.'

He seemed noticeably relieved at this information, and laying aside his pipe, replied quickly.

'Then I will accept the offer, whatever it is. I've got to get away from here, and I can't do it until I've realized the money invested in the property.'

I nodded, puzzled at his marked vehemence. 'My company will live up to its reputation of fairness,' I assured him. 'As your agent, we will ask only the customary commission for finding a purchaser and completing the transaction. Shall we draw up the papers now, then, and I will leave in the morning?'

'The papers can wait,' Trenard replied. 'It will be easier to write by daylight. And if you will pardon me, I am in the custom of retiring early. You may stay here and read, if you like. Your room is reached by the staircase and is the second door to the right.'

I nodded silently and watched him as he climbed the staircase with my grip-sack and disappeared somewhere in the darkness of the gallery above. Again he was either thoughtless, disturbed or characteristically impolite, for he made no offer to bid me goodnight.

After my refreshment, the profound weariness which had so dulled me since my arrival in Pine Island had gradually left, and I now experienced no desire for sleep. I picked up a leather-bound copy of Trenard's book, *The Mysteries of Sunken Dras*, and absently opened it. A clock ticked slowly, steadily, somewhere, as I glanced at random through the pages. Presently I came to several passages which had been underlined with pencil, and before them my eyes hesitated long enough to read:

'A careful study of the hieroglyphics on the tomb has led me to the belief that the inhabitants of Dras had reached an intelligence considerably higher than the average observer

would gather by merely examining the artifacts brought to the surface. I am of the opinion that the scholars and wise men at the courts of the five kings of the last dynasty had probed to a remarkable degree the most profound depths of abstract mathematical calculation and theoretical physics.'

And again:

'The Drasian theology seems to have been an unexplainable combination of the vilest forms of demonology and a scientific concept of the relation between time and space, or to be exact, a religious intellection based on the belief that the four-dimensional continuum, as we would term it today, is teeming with gargoyle horrors, the foulness of which the finite mind cannot even conceive. In this respect, I am almost led to believe that Einstein was crudely antedated thousands of years.'

Dry and bookish as these statements were, I gave them considerable thought. Toward the end of the volume, thrust in the pages, I came upon a scrap of paper covered with penciled writing. Let me say that ordinarily I am not addicted to reading other people's personal notations, but almost before I realized it, I was staring at the following:

'Can it be possible that the mausoleum's space interior itself constitutes a disruption of the space-time coordinates, a channel, so to speak, an opening formed in some unknown way by the priests of Dras which leads from our own three-dimensional world into the fourth dimension? It is a thought which seems unbelievable. Yet the strange tales the villagers told and their frantic exodus from Flume would confirm it. Surely Fielding's story which he told before he went down the last time was untrue. But even if true, it would be mad to think it has followed me and is out there now — out there, God forbid, with poor Sylvia. What does it all mean?

'Today, one of the forest rangers from the district north of here passed through and confirmed what I had already guessed to be true. The government-made dike constructed

to keep Opal Lake at its level on the north shore has been wearing away, and there is danger of inundation. How high the water will rise if it breaks through, I can't imagine. But I must get away from here. I shall go mad if I stay.'

I sat back and stared at these enigmatic lines, frowning. Undoubtedly it was Trenard's handwriting, but what, in the note's own words, did it all mean?

At length, shrugging, I closed the book, tossed it on to the table, and rose to my feet. There was a small half-sized door just before me, and if nothing else, it offered a way out of my thoughts. I longed to get out of the room. Its cold, white walls, blue ceiling and bleak furnishings produced in me that same sense of cheerlessness one finds in the interior of a hospital. I opened the door and stepped out under the night sky.

It was a small balcony that extended over the rear of the house. Even as I walked to the edge of the railing, the moon suddenly broke through a last rift of clouds, and I saw below me, like a sheath of ribbed silver, a long and narrow lake, the water swashing against the bushes almost at the building's foundation, the farther shores hidden by an intervening fringe of trees. Straight ahead, the gently rising surface was unbroken, but off to the left, toward the abandoned town of Flume, the water was dotted with orderly rows of white objects, which at that distance appeared to be pieces of anchored chalk. Farther on huddled a heavy shadow, the outlines of some huge building.

For a moment, I stood there musing. Then, as my eyes were drawn once again to those rows of white things, a little thrill of understanding swept through me.

The driver who had brought me from Pine Island had been right. This wasn't a lake. Those even files of white blocks were - tombstones! Tombstones, and the expanse of water before me must be a development of recent months, an inundated graveyard. The dike on Opal Lake's northern shore had finally worn away, and the water, seeking its own level, had flowed here, flooding without respect the last resting-place of Flume's dead.

Looking directly below me now, I saw half in the moonlight, half in the shadow, a small flat-bottom duck-boat, drawn up on the bush-lined shore. Why, indeed, my host should have wished to row out on such a body of water struck me as most singular.

And yet, as I gazed at the little craft and the short stubby oars thrown carelessly beside it, there came a distinct impulse that I myself go out on the moonlit water. I debated a moment, then lifting myself over the railing, dropped the short distance to the ground below. There was a certain macabre attraction to the scene before me.

Five seconds later I had adjusted the oars in the locks and shoved the boat gently into the lapping waves. Without knowing why, I headed due east, following the line of the shore. The moon, though high in the indigo heavens, seemed strangely bloated and out of proportion. As I rowed farther and farther, the white blank wall that marked Trenard's house fell back deeper into the gloom of foliage and looked out at me like an eyeless face swathed in a cowl. At intervals, I rested my oars across the thwart and sat surveying the scene.

Presently I was in that part of the lake that was directly over the old graveyard, and looking over my shoulder, I could see, some distance ahead, Trenard's mausoleum. There, within its ancient walls, was entombed the man's sister, Sylvia, buried in a monument that had once held the five kings of Dras. I pulled harder on my left oar and headed toward it.

The lake was even narrower here, the banks close, and I could see row on row of white tombstones and tilting crosses rising above the water. Waves swashed against them in a low liquid dirge. The water, too, seemed clearer than that fronting Trenard's house. Looking down over the boat's gunwales, I thought I saw more gravestones and crosses far below in the dark depths, gleaming white like scattered mounds of bleached bones.

Then the shadowy mass of the mausoleum rose like a curtain before me. To a general appearance, the architecture might be classed as Oriental, the domed roof rising gracefully like a Mohammedan mosque. Above the doorway, a hideous gargoyle perched on a block of stone.

I dipped my oars and brought the boat around to the other side, dark there with the shadow of the hidden moonlight, but still revealing a small iron-barred window that had been cut through the wall. With the boat bobbing close to the stone side, I steadied myself, reached up and strove to see into the interior.

My curiosity was disappointed. I saw nothing. Only a well of blackness met my eyes. For a moment, I remained in that perilous position, staring between the bars. And then – my head jerked back with revulsion.

Sweeping to my nostrils from the inner recesses of that vault had come a horrible fetid smell, a loathsome odor of unutterable filth. It surged out upon me like a putrescent blanket of green mold.

I clung there gasping. For an instant, there was only silence and that festering breath. Then, without warning, there came from within those walls a prolonged hiss like escaping steam and a heavy sluggish splashing in the interior water. Something cold and clammy slid across my hands clenched there on the iron bars, and I whipped them away dripping with blood, gashed to the bone.

I did not cry out: only dropped back into the boat and began to row furiously for the shore. I worked the paddles with might and main until my shoulders ached in their sockets.

Back in my own room in Trenard's house, I sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at my hands. Both were marked with deep ragged gashes between the wrist and first knuckle. Blood gushing from the wounds dyed the fingers crimson.

Confused, bewildered, I poured a quantity of water and carefully bathed the injured members. Then, utilizing the little first-aid kit I always carry in my grip-sack, I carefully bathed the gashes in iodine, then applied gauze and adhesive tape.

How long I lay there awake, I cannot tell: My brain was whirling, seeking an answer to it all. But at length I lapsed into a fitful slumber.

The rumble of thunder was in my ears when I awoke. Rain was slashing the pane of my bedroom window, and in the early morning gloom, a wall of trees, just beyond, was bending double in the face of a raging wind.

I jumped to my feet with an exclamation. Bad weather meant bad roads, and, considering the disrepair of the Flume-Pine Island trail, this unexpected storm might cause an enforced stay in Trenard's house, an outlook which, as I considered it, rose to appalling proportions.

Dressed, I made my way downstairs to find my worst fears

realized. The rain was slanting down in torrents, and the path that led across the glade into the woods was a swirling river of mud and water.

The little door leading to the balcony that faced the lake was open, and stepping to the sill, I paused and looked out.

Julian Trenard was standing at the railing, staring out ahead of him at the foaming lake. He was drenched to the skin, and the water was running down his face in tiny rivulets. Suddenly he became aware of my presence, whirled around and stepped back into the room. I watched him as he moved to a chair and sank into it with a low moan.

'Arnold,' he said, 'have you ever gone into the theory of relativity? Do you know anything of the principles of space-time, of the fourth dimension? Do you believe there are other worlds around us, worlds which, because of our limited three-dimensional senses, we cannot see or understand?'

I took out a cigarette, lit it twice before I made my reply.

'Yes, of course,' I said. 'I'm not so strong on my science, but I've read the usual articles. Why?'

The nerve near Trenard's mouth was twitching violently now. He got up, paced to the farther wall and back again, then hesitated before me, leaning hard on the table top.

'And do you believe it to be true that in that other fourth dimensional world there exist forms of life entirely removed from our own evolutionary scale, creatures horrible beyond the farthest reaches of our imagination? Do you believe that?'

'Who knows?' I replied. 'It's logical, I suppose. But the unknown is always popularly embodied with strange terrors. So far we have only a tangle of mathematical calculations to go by.'

He turned away without listening, and as I looked after him curiously, I thought I saw his lips form the words over and over again: 'Oh Sylvia, Sylvia!'

Both breakfast and the subsequent business formalities were dismal affairs. The storm, instead of dying down, grew steadily in fury, and we sat in that cheerless room with the thunder hammering overhead, and the wind rushed by the outer walls. Noon came and passed, with Trenard making no suggestion of a lunch. Curiously enough, the man had not seemed to notice the fact that both my hands were thickly

bound in bandages; or if he did, he asked no questions. The wounds, incidentally, were causing me constant worry. Though I had not inspected them since the night before, they felt hot and feverish, and an unpleasant sensation of a pulse, beating deep in the gashes, made me resolve to visit a doctor immediately upon my return to Boston. But the unexplainable events, of which those hurts were a climax, I deliberately thrust from my mind. That was something I could not think of without trembling in horror.

Abruptly at five o'clock the rain and the wind came to an end, and there was left only an occasional sullen delayed burst of thunder. The storm had passed on.

With the quieting of the elements, Trenard suddenly roused himself. A tremor seemed to pass through him from head to foot, and he called softly:

'I'm coming, Sylvia. I'll take you away.'

He ran across the room, flung open the outer door and disappeared. Moments dragged by as I stood looking after him. Had the man reached the climax of some mental malady? Were his queer actions, his apparent obsession, the result of a diseased brain?

I waited in indecision an instant. Then, as the cold gloominess of that room slowly gathered around me, I strode to the door and followed him. His footprints were embedded there in the wet loam, and slowly, half held back by some inner dread, I traced them around the outer wall of the house. At first I thought he was making for the little duck-boat I had used the night before, but the trail led farther on, through a dense thicket, down into a low marshy section of land, and finally to the edge of the lake.

I drew up behind the bole of a tree and peered ahead of me. Trenard was there, up to his knees in water, dragging a huge flat-bottomed barge to the shore from its anchoring buoy. Along the strip of beach stood seven steel drums, black barrels of apparently fifty-gallon capacity. I could not even guess at their contents.

As I watched, Trenard began to roll the barrels one by one onto the barge. They were terrifically heavy, it seemed, the man apparently using every ounce of his strength in the task. The barge itself was a strange affair. Half raft, half boat, it was

made of untrimmed logs, bound together with wire and rope of every size and description.

Puzzled I kept in the protective shadow of the tree and watched the work slowly being completed. Trenard was laboring like a madman now. Sweat was streaming from his forehead. He had thrown off his coat, and hatless, his hair hung wildly over his eyes.

At length, the last barrel was moved from the beach to the barge. Without a glance behind, Trenard leaped aboard, seized a long wooden staff, and began poling out into the lake. Fifty feet from the shore the depth became too great for the use of the pole, and he discarded it for a crude, square-bladed paddle arrangement which he operated from a socket in the bow.

For a long while, I watched him as he worked the clumsy craft slowly into the upper reaches of the lake. Then, when an intervening fringe of trees hid him from sight, I turned, ran back to the little duck-boat, threw in the oars, and shoved off in pursuit. Curiosity once more had got the better of me.

The lake lay as flat and motionless as a great mirror, and the tombstones ahead seemed only lighter reflections of the leaden sky. Ahead, the domed mausoleum reared itself above the colorless water.

But Trenard did not steer directly for the tomb. Carefully, as one proceeding under a long premeditated plan, he maneuvered the barge to a point some forty or fifty feet from the vault's entrance, and there, halting his paddling, seized one of the steel barrels and rolled it to the boat's edge. Gradually lessening the intervening space, I rowed my own craft parallel to the bank, watching him.

He had resumed his paddling again now, moving slowly forward with that one barrel still lying at the edge of the barge, almost touching the water. From that barrel a dark heavy liquid was pouring onto the lake, coloring the surface with a gleaming purple black, thickening in an ever-widening circle.

It was oil! No other fluid would act in like manner when in contact with water.

Round and round the mausoleum Trenard directed the barge. I was quite near now, and I could see the mingled expression of fear and determination in the man's face; the wild stare in his black eyes. Back and forth he worked the enormous

socket paddle, and in his wake grew a steadily widening trail of oil. When the steel drum was emptied, Trenard shoved it into the water and rolled another into position. And thus he repeated the process; circumnavigating the tomb again and again until the surface of the lake was black with petroleum.

At length, the contents of the seven barrels were emptied, and Trenard headed for the vault entrance. He lashed the mooring rope around one of the narrow stone columns, leaped out, and waded over the water-covered stairs to the door. A moment later I heard the iron barrier clang open and saw him disappear into the interior.

Five minutes passed, an eternity with only the gentle lapping of the water on the surrounding masonry. Then, as I leaned over the gunwale watching, Trenard reappeared, and I started as if struck by a blow. From the entrance of the vault he was dragging a heavy, oblong shape, struggling to slide it onto the barge. A black wooden box, it was . . . a coffin . . . the carved and ornamented casket of his sister, Sylvia.

But something was wrong. The man was making frantic efforts to close the iron door behind him. He was straining backward, arms bent double, exerting all his strength to force it into position. There was but a foot separating it from the latch, yet some interior force seemed holding it open.

Suddenly Trenard threw back his hands and uttered a shriek of horror. He released the door and with one wild lunge threw himself onto the barge, unfastened the mooring rope and seized the paddle arm. Back and forth he moved the blade, churning through the thick water. The clumsy craft began to move slowly away from the tomb.

And then - I can only chronicle the events that followed from the nightmare train of horror images that remain engraved on my mind. From the entrance of the domed mausoleum there emerged a thing which sent a wave of terror over me.

It was utterly bestial. It was a sight so indescribably loathsome and repulsive that it held me there in the boat, rigid and unable to believe my eyes, doubting my very sanity.

Creeping over the water-covered steps, past the carved columns, came a huge, bloated, semi-saurian monster, a giant sea serpent, an enormous water reptile, and yet a creature with

eight jointed, hairy spider-legs like some hybrid insect from the canvas of the mad August Schlegel. The body, sliding endlessly from the inner recesses of the vault, was a gleaming black, the head, a flat, pointed, featureless mass. As I stared out upon it and a great nausea rose up within me, I subconsciously catalogued it, in spite of those hairy spider-like appendages, as something akin to a Mosasaur, the giant sea snake that infested the pre-historic seas of the later Mesozoic. And yet, though I am neither biologist nor student of paleontology, though I have never beyond casual browsing, delved into the little-known subject of deep-pressure marine life, I knew it to be no naturally evolved form of life of my own mundane world.

Head and three long undulations above the surface, it poised there, then suddenly lunged straight at Trenard. Again the man screamed, and the cry shot over the lake, wailing to the farthest shore. He was working like a madman at the socket oar now, churning the oily water in great foaming waves, and the barge, with the coffin in its center, moved sluggishly forward.

And as I sat transfixed, in the boat, I thought I understood. The interior of that mausoleum, where once had been entombed the five kings of Dras, constituted a channel, an opening in space, formed in some strange way by the priests of that ancient city, leading from our own three-dimensional world to that of the fourth dimension. When Trenard had raised the tomb to the surface from the sea-floor, transported it here to the Flume cemetery, the passage through space-time had not disturbed that opening. It still existed in the vault's interior, a door to the world beyond.

I saw now the reason for Trenard's action. He had guessed all this too, long before. He had lived a life of constant growing dread in his lonely home, and had gradually become obsessed with the horrible thought that the body of his sister, Sylvia, was out there with the monster. Was not death in our plane but a process of transmutation, of metempsychosis into another world? And would not that creature drag her into a pit of deepest corruption where she would be imprisoned forever?

The huge thing, hairy appendages slowly treading water, was moving forward in pursuit of the barge. And Trenard was struggling at the oar, casting frantic glances behind him.

On swept the barge, the square prow turning the oily surface

of the lake into a river of creaming ink. Behind, and scattered at intervals near the mausoleum, floated the seven empty steel drums, half submerged, like so many black porpoises.

Scarcely ten yards apart they were now, and even from where I sat in the duck-boat, I could see the veins on Trenard's brow extend, as he worked the huge paddle. Mercifully, perhaps, the occurrences of the next few instants have been blurred in my memory.

There it was, poised on the surface of the lake, a creation from the inner reaches of a geometric hell, python body stretched flat downward now, hairy spider-legs motionless. Then, it closed in on him.

Trenard had only an instant. With a leap, he whirled away from the arm of the socket paddle and clawed madly at his pockets. Then a pin-point of orange flame flared up, and with a start I understood.

Trenard meant to ignite the heavy film of oil that covered the surface of the water. He had planned this carefully as the one and only means of self-preservation. Now he turned the flame of the match to the box itself and flung the flaming missile out before him. Then with a scream, he looked over his shoulder.

The thing was upon him. Trenard lurched to the opposite end of the barge and flung himself wide and clear into the thick water.

Even as his body momentarily disappeared beneath the surface, a wall of flame shot up over the spot, raced toward the monster and the barge. I can tell little more. I saw the whole tableau before me transform into a roaring cauldron. There came a violent lashing and floundering as the monster found itself caught in the center of it. One after another, I saw the spider-legs burst into flame. Up from the cremating body rose a thick, greenish miasma.

The lake was singing with flame now. Red reflections stabbed deep into the watery depths. The barge and its coffin cargo were a floating funeral pyre. Of Trenard, there was no sign. Only flaming oil, leaping higher and higher, swirled over the spot where he had disappeared. Abruptly, a dense billow of black smoke belched upward and hid it all in a thick curtain.

But I had no wish to see more. I seized the oars of the

duck-boat and rowed madly to the beach. Five feet from the shore I leaped into the water and ran – through the dripping woods, down the old logging road and into the abandoned town of Flume.

To this day, my passage from the lake across the long tortuous miles to Pine Island remains a blank spot in my memory. There is but a single instant during the endless hours of that advance which I can recall with any degree of clarity, a moment when I reached a higher, open point on the old road and looked out upon a scene that probed its gloom into the lowest reaches of my soul.

The lowering sky was deepening into dusk, and the wilderness stretched below me, a dark carpet of undulating green. In its center, like a leaden wedge, lay the elliptical expanse of that lake. Off to the side brooded a heavier shadow, which I knew to be the Dras mausoleum, and over all, from shore to shore, hung a slowly diminishing cloud of smoke.

THE DIGGING AT PISTOL KEY

Although he had lived in Trinidad for more than fifteen years, Jason Cunard might as well have remained in Devonshire, his original home, for all the local background he had absorbed. He read only British newspapers, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, which he received by weekly post, and he even had his tea sent him from a shop in Southampton, unmindful of the fact that he could have obtained the same brand, minus the heavy tax, at the local importer in Port-of-Spain.

Of course, Cunard got into town only once a month, and then his time was pretty well occupied with business matters concerning his sugar plantation. He had a house on a narrow promontory midway between Port-of-Spain and San Fernando which was known as Pistol Key. But his plantation sprawled over a large tract in the center of the island.

Cunard frankly admitted there was nothing about Trinidad he liked. He thought the climate insufferable, the people – the Britishers, that is – provincial, and the rest of the population, a polyglot of races that could be grouped collectively as ‘natives and foreigners’. He dreamed constantly of Devonshire, though he knew of course he would never go back.

Whether it was due to this brooding or his savage temper, the fact remained that he had the greatest difficulty in keeping house-servants. Since his wife had died two years ago, he had had no less than seven: Caribs, quadroons, and Creoles of one sort or another. His latest, a lean, gangly black boy, went by the name of Christopher, and was undoubtedly the worst of the lot.

As Cunard entered the house now, he was in a distinctly bad frame of mind. Coming down the coast highway, he had had the misfortune to have a flat tire and had damaged his clothes considerably in changing it. He rang the antiquated bell-pull savagely.

Presently Christopher shambled through the connecting doorway.

'Put the car in the garage,' Cunard said tersely. 'And after dinner repair the spare tire. Some fool left a broken bottle on the road.'

The Negro remained standing where he was, and Cunard saw then that he was trembling with fear.

'Well, what the devil's the matter?'

Christopher ran his tongue over his upper lip. 'Can't go out dere, sar,' he said.

'Can't . . . Why not?'

'De holes in de yard. Dey dere again.'

For the first time in more than an hour Cunard permitted himself to smile. While he was totally without sympathy for the superstitions of these blacks, he found the intermittent recurrence of these holes in his property amusing. For he knew quite well that superstition had nothing to do with them.

It all went back to that most diabolical of buccaneers, Francis L'Ollonais and his voyage to the Gulf of Venezuela in the middle of the seventeenth century. After sacking Maracaibo, L'Ollonais sailed with his murderous crew for Tortuga. He ran into heavy storms and was forced to put back in here at Trinidad.

Three or four years ago some idiot by the idiotic name of Arlanpeel had written and published a pamphlet entitled *Fifty Thousand Pieces of Eight* in which he sought to prove by various references that L'Ollonais had buried a portion of his pirate booty on Pistol Key. The pamphlet had sold out its small edition, and Cunard was aware that copies had now become a collector's item. As a result, Pistol Key had come into considerable fame. Tourists stopping off at Port-of-Spain frequently telephoned Cunard, asking permission to visit his property, a request which of course he always refused.

And the holes! From time to time during the night Cunard would be awakened by the sound of a spade grating against gravel, and looking out his bedroom window, he would see a carefully shielded lantern down among the cabbage palms. In the morning there would be a shallow excavation several feet across with the dirt heaped hastily on all four sides.

The thought of persons less fortunate than himself making

clandestine efforts to capture a mythical fortune dating to the seventeenth century touched Cunard's sense of humor.

'You heard me, Christopher,' he snapped to the houseboy, 'put the car in the garage.'

But the black remained cowering by the door until Cunard, his patience exhausted, dealt him a sharp slap across the face with the flat of his hand. The boy's eyes kindled, and he went out silently.

Cunard went up to his bathroom and washed the road grime from his hands. Then he proceeded to dress for his solitary dinner, a custom which he never neglected. Downstairs, he got to thinking again about those holes in his yard and decided to have a look at them. He took a flashlight and went out the rear entrance and under the cabbage palms. Fireflies glowed in the darkness and a belated Qu'est-ce-qu'il-dit bird asked its eternal question.

Forty yards from the house he came upon the diggings Christopher had reported. That they were the work of some ambitious fortune hunter was made doubly apparent by the discarded tape-measure and the cheap compass which lay beside the newly turned earth.

Again Cunard smiled. It would be 'forty paces from this point to the north end of a shadow cast by a man fifteen hands high', or some such fiddle faddle. Even if L'Ollonais had ever buried money here – and there was no direct evidence that he had – it had probably been carted away long years ago.

He saw Christopher returning from the garage then. The houseboy was walking swiftly, mumbling a low litany to himself. In his right hand he held a small cross fashioned of two bent twigs.

Back in the house, Cunard told himself irritably that Christopher was a fool. After all, he had seen his mother come into plenty of trouble because of her insistence on practicing *obeah*. She had professed to be an *obeah*-woman and was forever speaking incantations over broken eggshells, bones, tufts of hair and other disagreeable objects. Employed as a laundress by Cunard, he had discovered her one day dropping a white powder into his tea cup, and unmindful of her plea that it was merely a good-health charm designed to cure his recurrent spells of malaria, he had turned her over to the Constabulary.

He had pressed charges too, testifying that the woman had attempted to poison him. Largely because of his influence, she had been convicted and sent to the Convict Depot at Tobago. Christopher had stayed on because he had no other place to go.

The meal over, Cunard went into the library with the intention of reading for several hours. Although *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* reached him in bundles of six copies a fortnight or so after they were published, he made it a practice to read only Monday's copy on Monday and so on through the week, thus preserving the impression that he was still in England.

But this night as he strode across to his favorite chair, he drew up short with a gasp. The complete week's bundle of newspapers had been torn open and their contents scattered about in a wild and disorganized pile. To add to this sacrilege, one of the sheets had a ragged hole in it where an entire column had been torn out. For an instant Cunard was speechless. Then he wheeled on Christopher.

'Come here,' he roared. 'Did you do this?'

The houseboy looked puzzled.

'No, sar,' he said.

'Don't lie to me. How dare you open my papers?'

But Christopher insisted he knew nothing of the matter. He had placed the papers on their arrival in the library and had not touched them since.

Cunard's rage was mounting steadily. A mistake he might have excused, but an out-and-out lie . . .

'Come with me,' he said in a cold voice.

Deliberately he led the way into the kitchen, looked about him carefully. Nothing there. He went back across the little corridor to the houseboy's small room under the stairway. While Christopher stood protesting in the doorway, Cunard marched across to the table and silently picked up a torn section of a newspaper.

'So you did lie!' he snarled.

The sight of the houseboy with his perpetual grin there in the doorway was too much for the planter. His rage beyond control, he seized the first object within reach – a heavy length of wood resting on a little bracket mounted on the wall – and threw it with all his strength.

The missile struck Christopher squarely on the temple. He

uttered no cry, but remained motionless a moment, the grin frozen on his face. Then his legs buckled and he slumped slowly to the floor.

Cunard's fists clenched. 'That'll teach you to respect other people's property,' he said. His anger, swift to come, was receding as quickly, and noting that the houseboy lay utterly still, he stepped forward and stirred him with his foot.

Christopher's head rolled horribly.

Quickly Cunard stooped and felt for a pulse. None was discernible. With trembling fingers he drew out a pocket mirror and placed it by the boy's lips. For a long moment he held it there, but there was no resultant cloud of moisture. Christopher was dead!

Cunard staggered across to the chair and sat down. Christopher's death was one thing and one thing only – murder! The fact that he was a man of color and Cunard an influential planter would mean nothing in a Crown court of law. He could see the bewigged magistrate now; he could hear the evidence of island witnesses, testifying as to his uncontrollable temper, his savage treatment of servants.

Even if there were not actual danger of incarceration – and he knew there was – it would mean the loss of his social position and prestige.

And then Cunard happened to think of the holes in his yard. A new one – a grave for the dead houseboy – would never be noticed, and he could always improvise some sort of story that the boy had run off. As far as Cunard knew, other than the old crone who was his mother, Christopher had no other kin, having come originally from Jamaica.

The planter was quite calm now. He went to his room, changed to a suit of old clothes and a pair of rubber-soled shoes. Then, returning to the little room under the stairs, he rolled the body of the houseboy into a piece of sailcloth and carried it out into the yard.

He chose a spot near the far corner of his property where a clump of bamboo grew wild and would effectually shield him from any prying eyes. But there were no prying eyes, and half an hour later Cunard returned to the house. There he carefully cleaned the clinging loam from the garden spade, washed his shoes and brushed his trousers.

It was when he went again to the room under the stairs to gather together Christopher's few possessions that he saw the piece of wood that had served as the death missile. Cunard picked it up and frowned. The thing was an *obeah* fetish apparently, an ugly little carving with a crude likeness of an animal head and a squat human body. The lower half of the image ended in a flat panel, the surface of which was covered with wavy lines, so that the prostrate figure looked as if it were partially immersed in water. Out of that carved water two arms extended upward, as in supplication, and they were arms that were strangely reminiscent for Cunard. Christopher's mother had had arms like that, smooth and strangely youthful for a person of her age. There was even a chip of white coral on one of the fingers like the coral ring the old woman always wore.

Cunard threw the thing onto the pile of other objects he had gathered: spare clothes, several bright colored scarves, a sack of cheap tobacco, made a bundle of them and burned them in the old-fashioned cook stove with which the kitchen was equipped.

The last object to go into the fire was the newspaper clipping, and the planter saw then with a kind of grim horror that Christopher had not lied at all, that the top of the paper in fact bore a date-line several months old and was one of a lot he had given to the houseboy 'to look at de pictures'.

For several days after that Cunard did not leave his house. He felt nervous and ill-at-ease, and he caught himself looking out the window toward the bamboo thicket on more than one occasion. Curiously too, there was an odd murmuring in his ears like the sound of distant water flowing.

On the third day, however, he was sufficiently himself to make a trip to town. He drove the car at a fast clip to Port-of-Spain, parked on Marine Square and went about his business. He was walking down Frederick Street half an hour later when he suddenly became aware that an aged Negro woman with her head tied in a red kerchief was following him.

Cunard didn't have a direct view of her until just as he turned a corner, and then only a glance, but his heart stopped dead still for an instant. Surely that black woman was Christopher's mother whom he had sent to prison. True, her face was almost hidden by the folds of the loosely-draped kerchief, but

he had seen her hand, and there was the coral ring on it. Wild thoughts rushed to Cunard's head. Had the woman been released then? Had she missed her son, and did she suspect what had happened?

Cunard drew up in a doorway, but the old crone did not pass him, and when he looked back down the street, she was nowhere in sight.

Nevertheless the incident unnerved him. When, later in the day, he met Inspector Bainley of the Constabulary, he seized the opportunity to ask several questions that would ease his mind.

'Where have you been keeping yourself?' Bainley asked. 'I haven't seen much of you lately.'

Cunard lit a cigar with what he hoped was a certain amount of casualness.

'I've been pretty busy,' he replied. 'My houseboy skipped, you know. The blighter simply packed off without warning.'

'So?' said Bainley. 'I thought Christopher was a pretty steady chap.'

'In a way,' said Cunard. 'And in a way he wasn't.' And then: 'By the way, do you remember his mother? I was wondering whether she had been released. I thought I saw her a moment ago on the street.'

The Inspector smiled a thin smile. 'Then you were seeing things,' he said. 'She committed suicide over at the Convict Depot at Tobago two months ago.'

Cunard stared.

'At least we called it suicide,' Inspector Bainley went on. 'She took some sort of an *obeah* potion when she found we weren't going to let her go, and simply lay back and died. It was rather odd that the medico couldn't find any trace of poison though.'

Cunard was rather vague about the rest of the day's events. He recalled making some trifling purchases, but his mind was wandering, and twice he had to be reminded to pick up his change. At four o'clock he abruptly found himself thinking of his old friend, Hugh Donay, and the fact that Donay had employed Christopher's mother a year or so before she had entered Cunard's services. Donay had a villa just outside of town, and it

would take only a few moments to see him. Of course there was no reason to see him. If Bainley said the old woman had committed suicide, that settled it. Yet Cunard told himself the Inspector might have been mistaken or perhaps joking. He himself was a strong believer in his powers of observation, and it bothered him to have doubts cast upon them.

The planter drove through the St Clair district and turned into a driveway before a sprawling house with roof of red tile. Donay, a thin waspish man, was lounging in a hammock and greeted Cunard effusively.

'Tried to get you by phone the other day,' he said, 'but you weren't at home. Had something I wanted to tell you. About that L'Ollonais treasure that's supposed to be buried on your property.'

Cunard frowned. 'Have you started believing that too?'

'This was an article in the *Daily Mail*, and it had some new angles that were rather interesting. I get my paper here in town before you do out there on Pistol Key, you know.'

Cunard attempted to swing the conversation into other channels, but Donay was persistent.

'Funny thing about that article,' he said. 'I read it the same day the burglar was here.'

'Burglar?' Cunard lifted his eyes.

'Well,' Donay said, 'Jim Barrett was over here, and I showed him the paper. Barrett said it was the first description he had read that sounded logical and that the directions given for locating the treasure were very clear and concise. Just at that moment there was a sound in the corridor, and Barrett leaped up and made a dash for the kitchen.'

'I might tell you that for several days I thought prowlers were about. The lock on the cellar door was found broken, and several times I'd heard footsteps in the laundry-room. Several things were out of place in the laundry-room too, though what anyone would want there is more than I can see.'

'Anyway, Barrett shouted that someone was in the house. We followed the sounds down into the cellar, and just as we entered the door into the laundry-room, there was a crash and the sound of glass breaking.'

Donay smiled sheepishly as if to excuse all these details.

'It was only a bottle of bluing,' he went on, 'but what I can't

figure out is how the prowler got in and out of that room without our seeing anyone pass. There's only one door, you know, and the windows are all high up.'

'Was anything stolen?' Cunard asked.

'Nothing that I'm aware of. That bluing though was running across the floor toward a hamper of clean linen, and without thinking I used the first thing handy to wipe it up. It happened to be the newspaper with that treasure article in it. So I'm afraid ...'

'It doesn't matter. I can read it in my copy,' Cunard said. But even as he spoke, a vision of his own torn paper flashed to him.

'That isn't quite all,' Donay said. 'The next day I found every blessed wastebasket in the house turned upside down and their contents scattered about. Queer, isn't it?'

The conversation changed after that, and they talked of idle things. But just before he left Cunard said casually,

'By the way, my houseboy Christopher's run off. Didn't his mother work for you as a laundress or something?'

'That's right,' Donay said, 'I turned her over to you when I took a trip up to the States. Don't you remember?'

Cunard drove through town again, heading for the highway to Pistol Key. He had just turned off Marine Square when he suddenly slammed down hard on the brakes. The woman darted from the curb directly into his path, and with the lowering sun in his eyes, he did not see her until it was too late. Cunard got out of the car, shaking like a leaf, fully expecting to find a crumpled body on the bumper.

But there was no one there, and a group of Portuguese street laborers eyed him curiously as he peered around and under the car. He was almost overcome with relief, but at the same time he was disturbed. For in that flash he had seen of the woman against the sun, he was almost sure he had seen the youthful dark-skinned arms of Christopher's mother.

Back at Pistol Key Cunard spent the night. The sensation of distant running water was stronger in his ears now. 'Too much quinine,' he told himself. 'I'll have to cut down on the stuff.'

He lay awake for some time, thinking of the day's events. But

as his brain went over the major details in retrospection, he found himself supplying the missing minor details and so fell into a haze of peaceful drowsiness.

At two o'clock by the radium clock on the chiffonier, he awoke abruptly. The house was utterly still, but through the open window came an intermittent metallic sound. It died away, returned after an interval of several minutes. Cunard got out of bed, put on his brocaded dressing robe and strode to the window. A full moon illumined the grounds save where the palmistes cast their darker shadow, and there was no living person in evidence.

Below him and slightly to the left there was a freshly dug hole. But it was not that that caused Cunard to pass his hands before his eyes as if he had been dreaming. It was the sight of a spade alternately disappearing in the hole and reappearing to pile the loosened soil on the growing mound. A spade that moved slowly, controlled by aged yet youthful-appearing arms and hands, but arms unattached to any human body.

In the morning Cunard called the *Port-of-Spain Journal*, instructing them to run an advertisement for a houseboy, a task which he had neglected the day before. Then he went out to his post box to get the mail.

The morning mist had not yet cleared. It hung over the hibiscus hedges like an endless line of white shrouds. As he reached the end of the lane, Cunard thought he saw a figure turn from the post box and move quickly toward a grove of ceiba trees. He thought nothing of it at first, for those trees flanked the main road which was traveled by residents of the little native settlement at the far end of Pistol Key. But then he realized that the figure had moved away from the road, in a direction leading obliquely toward his own house.

Still the matter did not concern him particularly until he opened the post box. There was a single letter there, and it had not come by regular mail; the dirty brown envelope bore neither stamp nor cancellation mark. Inside was a torn piece of newspaper.

Cunard realized at once that it was the missing piece from his *Daily Mail*. But who besides Christopher could have had access to the house and who would steal a newspaper column and return it in the post box?

It was like him that he made no attempt to read the paper until he had returned to the library. Then he matched it with the torn sheet still on his desk. The two pieces fitted exactly. He sat back and began to read.

The first part was a commonplace enough account of the opening of new auction parlors in Southwick Street, London, and a description of some of the more unusual articles that had been placed for sale there. Cunard, reading swiftly, found his eyes attracted to the following:

Among the afternoon offerings was the library of the late Sir Adrian Fell of Queen Anne's Court, which included an authentic first edition of McNair's *Bottle of Heliotrope* and a rare quarto volume of *Lucri Causa*. There was also a curious volume which purported to be the diary of the Caribbean buccaneer, Francis L'Ollonais, written while under the protection of the French West India Company at Tortuga.

This correspondent had opportunity to examine the latter book and found some interesting passages. According to the executors of the estate it had been obtained by Sir Adrian on his trip to Kingston in 1904, and so far as is known, is the only copy in existence.

Under the heading, 'The Maracaibo Voyage', L'Ollonais describes his destruction of that town, of his escape with an enormous booty, and of the storms which beset him on his return trip to Tortuga. It is here that the diary ceases to be a chronological date-book and becomes instead a romantic narrative.

L'Ollonais, driven southward, managed to land on Trinidad, on a promontory known as Pistol Key. There 'By a greate pile of stones whiche looked fair like two horses running,' he buried the equivalent of fifty thousand pieces of eight. His directions for locating the treasure are worth quoting:

'Sixty paces from the south forward angle of the horse rock to the crossing of a line west by south west by the compass from a black pointed stone shaped like a broken needle near the shore. At this point if a man will stand in the light of a full moon at the eleventh hour, the shadow of his head will fall upon the place.'

Cunard lowered the paper and thoughtfully got a cigar out of the silver humidor on the table. So there was truth in that story of hidden treasure after all. Perhaps the money was still there, and he had been a fool to ridicule the motive behind those holes in his yard. He smoked in silence.

How many persons, he wondered, had seen that newspaper story. There was Hugh Donay and Jim Barrett, of course, but they didn't count. Few others here subscribed to the *Daily Mail*. Of those that did, the odds were against any of them wading through such a dull account. The fact remained, however, that someone had read it in his own copy and had been sufficiently interested to tear it from the sheet. Who was that person? And why had they seen fit to return it by way of his post box?

The landmarks he knew only too well. He had often remarked that that stone near the end of his property resembled two galloping horses. And the black stone 'like a broken needle' was still there, a rod or two from shore.

Suddenly fear struck Cunard – fear that he might already be too late. He leaped from his chair and ran out into the grounds.

There were four holes and the beginning of a fifth in evidence. But, moving quickly from one to another, the planter saw with relief that all were shallow and showed no traces of any object having been taken from them.

Cunard hastened back to the house where he procured a small but accurate compass and a ball of twine. Then he went into the tool-house and brought out a pair of oars for the dory that was moored at the water's edge on a little spit of sand.

An hour later his work was finished. He had rowed the dory out to the needle point of rock and fastened one end of the twine to it. The other end he stretched across to the horse rock in the corner of his property. Then he counted off the required sixty paces and planted a stick in the ground to mark the spot. After that there was nothing he could do until night. He hoped there would be no clouds to obstruct the moon.

Still there was the possibility someone might blunder here while he was in the house, and after a moment's thought Cunard returned to the tool-house and rummaged through the mass of odds and ends that had collected there through the years. He found an old doorbell that had been discarded when

the more musical chimes had been installed in the house, also several batteries and a coil of wire.

During the war Cunard had made a superficial study of electricity and wireless as part of what he considered his patriotic duties, and he now proceeded to wire a crude but efficient alarm system around the general area where he conceived the treasure to be.

Back in the house, he settled himself to wait the long hours until moon-rise. In the quiet of inactivity he was conscious again of that sound of distant water flowing. He made a round of all taps in the house, but none was leaking.

During his solitary dinner he caught himself glancing out the window into the grounds, and once he thought he saw a shadow move across the lawn and into the trees. But it must have been a passing cloud, for he didn't see it again.

At two p.m. a knock sounded on the door. Cunard was surprised and somewhat disconcerted to see Inspector Bainley standing on the veranda.

'Just passing by,' Bainley said, smiling genially. 'Had a sudden call from the native village out on the Key. Seems a black boy got into some trouble out there. Thought it might be your Christopher.'

'But that's impos—' Cunard checked himself. 'I hardly think it likely,' he amended. 'Christopher would probably go as far as he could, once he started.'

They drank rum. The Inspector seemed in no hurry to leave, and Cunard was torn between two desires, not to be alone and to be free from Bainley's gimlet eyes which always seemed to be moving about restlessly.

Finally he did go, however. The throb of his car was just dying off down the road when Cunard heard a new sound which electrified him to attention. The alarm bell!

Yet there was no one in the grounds. The wires were undisturbed, and the makeshift switch he had fashioned was still open. The bell was silent when he reached it.

With the moon high over his shoulder Cunard wielded his spade rapidly. The spot where the shadow of his head fell was disagreeably close to the bamboo thicket where he had buried Christopher, but as a matter of fact, he wasn't quite sure where

that grave was, so cleverly had he hidden all traces of his work.

The hole had now been dug to a depth of four feet, but there was no indication anything had been buried there. Cunard toiled strenuously another half hour. And then quite suddenly his spade struck something hard and metallic. A wave of excitement swept over him. He switched on his flashlight and turned it in the hole. Yes, there it was, the rusted top of a large iron chest – the treasure of L'Ollonais.

He resumed digging, but as he dug, he became aware that the sand, at first dry and hard, had grown moist and soggy. The spade became increasingly heavy with each scoop, and presently water was running off it, glistening in the moonlight. Water began to fill the bottom of the hole too, making it difficult for Cunard to work.

But it was not until ten minutes later that he saw something protruding from the water. In the moonlight two slender dark objects were reaching outward, a pair of Negro feminine arms gently weaving to and fro.

Cunard stiffened while a wave of horror swept over him. They were dark-skinned arms of an aged Negress, yet somehow they were smooth and youthful. The middle finger of the left hand bore a ring of white coral.

Cunard screamed and lunged backward. Too late, one of those grasping hands encircled his ankle and jerked him forward. And as he fell across the hole, those hands wrapped themselves about his throat and drew his head slowly but deliberately downward . . .

'Yes, it's a queer case,' Inspector Bainley said, tamping tobacco into his pipe. 'But then of course no more queer than a lot of things that happen here in the islands.'

'You say this fellow, Cunard, murdered his houseboy, Christopher?' the Warrant-Officer said.

Bainley nodded. 'I knew his savage temper would get the better of him some day. He buried the body in the yard and apparently rigged up that alarm arrangement to warn him of any trespassers. Then he contrived that story which he told me, that Christopher had run off.'

'Of course we know now that Cunard was trying to find that buried treasure by following the directions given in that news-

paper clipping. But that doesn't explain why he disregarded those directions and attempted to dig open the houseboy's grave again. Or why, before he had finished, he thrust his head into the shallow hole and lay in the little pool of seepage water until he drowned.'

MOSS ISLAND

Fifteen miles off the New Brunswick coast, to the south of Marchester yet north of Lamont, lies a great timber-covered rock which has become known as Moss Island. With its endless chain of reefs, its frowning sheer walls, and its bastions of dense underbrush and giant trees, the island has remained untrampled and primeval. Fishermen fear its jagged sides and keep well away. And as far as I have been able to learn, I am the only human being, or at least the only one for years, who has cared to visit its Eden shores.

For the sum of ten dollars, a little fishing smack had brought me out, had carefully threaded its way to a bit of beach on the western side.

'You're a fool,' the rather deaf owner of the boat had growled when we arrived. 'I'm givin' you fair warnin'. I'll keep my part of the bargain and come back for you at five o'clock, but only if the weather permits. I'm not so crazy about the looks of that sky over there, and if there's anythin' stronger'n a breeze comes up – well, you can figure on stayin' here 'til it calms down. I ain't a-goin' through that bunch of saw-teeth in a wind for the fun of it. Not with *my* boat. Anyway, what's interestin' here? Nothin' on Moss Island but trees and rocks. Not even any moss no more. Somethin' killed it,' and he pointed to a smooth expanse of black rock, in places covered by a mass of last year's vines, dead and brown colored. One slab high above me looked like a woman with long, flowing hair, a great embossed Medusa, it seemed, when the wind ruffled the withered grasses.

'That's Mape vine, not moss,' I corrected him. 'There's probably lots of moss farther in where there's damp shade.' I picked up my hammer, my chart-drawing board and my knapsack and stepped from the boat, adding in explanation: 'I'm going to do a little geological survey work, examine the rock

formations, you know; and I don't think we'll have a storm. The weather report didn't say so.'

He gave a derisive humph, whether at the nature of my work or my remark about meteorology I was left wondering, for without another word he shoved off. For a while I watched the boat bobbing away through the white caps, the little sail growing smaller and smaller and showing clean white in contrast to the green water and the blue sky. Then I turned to my surroundings.

I was still below the island proper, the cliff running some thirty to fifty feet up to the edge of the woods. In some places the wall was almost perpendicular, and I looked about for means of climbing it. Farther on along the beach I came upon a break and a series of jags which, with a little maneuvering, would serve as a staircase. I began my ascent. It was hard, slow work. Gulls whirled about me at my interruption, filling the air with their clamor. Ensnarled Mape vine impeded my progress and clumps of scarlet bush, which seemed to thrive on the scant nourishment it found in soil-filled crevices, dug its thorns relentlessly into my hands. Upon a little jutting shelf I saw a dead snake, its head hanging into space as though watching something below.

At length I reached the top, which I found to be flat as a plateau, the surface from the edge of the cliff quite void of vegetation for a distance of about five yards, when abruptly began a wall of trees, the outer ones bearing evidence of the ravages of the elements. Peering off to sea again, I tried to catch sight of the boat that had brought me, but though I looked until the air before my eyes appeared porous, I could see no sign of it.

Striving to throw off a growing feeling of depression, I broke out into a loud whistle, following any tune my lips desired. The whistle seemed to travel for miles in the clear air. It rose above the trees and went far over the island. There was no echo. Only the waves swashed over rocks below me, and as I walked along the screaming cries of a solitary gull fell perfectly into the rhythmic cadence of my steps.

I kept close to the edge of the cliff. To have attempted penetrating that jungle of growth would have been foolhardy. So I watched for a place where the trees might thin, reflecting idly

that the glacial drift must be of a considerable depth to support such extensive vegetation. About half a mile onward I found some pieces of shale with a few shell fossils and a small slab of limestone with remarkably clear impressions of crinoids. These ancient forms of marine life I determined to be of the Mississippian geologic period.

But for some reason I lost interest in my work. The very solitude of the island seemed to have crept into me and dulled my senses. Occasionally I was forced to enter the wood to circle a mound of larger rocks that defied ascent. Occasionally I caught the glint of the sun shining upon the bloated body of a dead fish lying far below on the little stretch of sand. And although I had gone only a short distance, all the while the weight of my knapsack seemed steadily increasing.

By three o'clock I had almost reached the opposite side of the island. It was there on the eastern exposure that I came upon a sheer wall, a rock formation that would have delighted the most experienced geologist. Here with the Pennsylvania strata folded and resting upon the eroded edges of the Mississippian was a great sedimentary history of geologic time.

For a long while I examined the wall – from its base upward as high as I could reach. At length, taking my hammer, I began working on a rather peculiar outcropping vein or slight discoloration on the rock. Strangely enough, as I went deeper the color changed: from a dark brown at the surface to a reddish brown and from a reddish brown to a deep scarlet. If this were oxidation . . . but no . . . And then suddenly my hammer broke through – into a cavity in the limestone, a large hole which had been hollowed out by the ground-water slowly filtering through the rock crevices and in the course of time dissolving the soluble parts. Such cavities are common to limestone, I knew, but sometimes rather interesting phenomena accompany them. And so with a feeling of expectation I went to work with a will, enlarging the aperture until it was wide enough to thrust in my hand.

I extended my arm into the opening gently, felt a cold, sticky liquid touch the fingers. Hastily I drew my hand to sight. It was dripping with a brownish, viscous solution that had a musty odor. I stared in amazement. Pockets of mineral water are not uncommon in this district, but always it is clear and transparent.

The thought of oil flashed across my mind. But there is no oil on the New Brunswick coast nor for thousands of miles in any direction. And this brownish mass in no way resembled crude petroleum. It was very odd.

And then quite suddenly I remembered a recent conversation with Professor Monroe at the University of Rentharp, where I am doing graduate work in geology and mineralogy.

'Phillip,' he had said when I came upon him in one of the laboratories, 'I believe I've made a discovery.' And while he worked he had told me about Muscivol, the name which he had given to his find. 'It is very rare,' he had said, 'rarer than radium.'

I have always been interested in botany and I have a fair knowledge of the subject, but I confess some of his scientific explanation went over my head. This much, however, I roughly gathered:

In northern climates, under favorable conditions, can be found a rare moss which resembles and yet fundamentally differs from the common *Saelania* moss. After living in great luxuriance for a number of seasons, this *Musci* plant will suddenly die. If the diseased plant is examined just before its death, it will be found that almost a reversal of the natural processes of growth is going on.

A month earlier a small blister or pouch develops just above the rootlets. And for some unknown reason most of the food elements which the plant obtains from the soil and from the air, instead of serving to nourish the whole plant, gather and centralize in this pouch in liquid form. The rest of the plant is thus robbed of its food; it can no longer live healthily, and growing in damp places as it does, it is slowly overcome by rot.

The decay affects the contents of the pouch. The liquid goes through a process of fermentation. At length, the pouch bursts and the liquid soaks into the soil.

If a large number of these diseased moss plants are present, the ground will be almost saturated with the liquid. In time – always under favorable conditions – the liquid will soak down until it reaches and becomes a part of the ground-water – that is: the water in the solid rock below the surface which one taps when digging a well.

Limestone is full of subterranean cavities. The water carrying

this plant-liquid in solution may find one of these, enter it, and become stagnant. Gradually the cavity deep down in the rock will be filled with the pouch-liquid of hundreds of these diseased mosses. And what is equally important with it will be certain amounts of mineral matter which is always present in the ground-water.

'Nowhere can it be found in the same intensity,' Professor Monroe had said, 'and in no two places is it really the same, for the mineral matter in the solution will always vary.'

'Well, what good is it?' I had asked, rather bored by his long explanation.

The professor put down his test tube, leaned across the laboratory table: 'I have discovered by accident that sometimes this liquid – Muscivol, I have called it – sometimes contains all the elements of growth.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that if I apply a small quantity of it that has the right amount of mineral matter in solution to the original moss plant, one in healthy condition, its rate of growth will be speeded up tremendously. I mean that the few drops of Muscivol I have been able to find when placed on the stalk of a moss plant caused it to leap upward to twice its original size in a few seconds.'

And as I stood there on the cliff, staring at my dripping fingers, it all came back to me. With a start I realized that this must be a vug of Muscivol, that rarest of liquids, the essence of moss growth. I emptied the coffee from my thermos bottle and, using the cover as a cup, carefully reached into the cavity and with the utmost care began the process of capturing as much of the sticky fluid as I could. I smiled to myself as I pictured Professor Monroe's surprise and delight when I brought him this find. The most he had been able to discover was a few drops, while here was almost a quart. True, I did not know as yet if it contained the necessary mineral matter to make it potent. That I must leave to the professor and his test tubes. When I had filled the thermos bottle, I carefully closed it and placed it in my knapsack.

The next hour I spent in making a rough chart of the sedimentary wall before me and writing in my notebook a brief geologic description of the island. All this, of course, was part of my university work. At length, the brief survey complete, it

occurred to me that I still had time for further exploration before the boatman would return, and so shouldering my knapsack, I headed into the interior.

In a moment, as though a mighty door were shut, the woods closed dark upon me, and I found myself in a jungle of growth that discouraged further penetration. Gradually, however, as I struggled forward, the underbrush, finding insufficient sunlight to exist, thinned down until there were left only trees and moss. The strange luxuriant abundance of the latter accounted, I saw, for the island's name. Fern moss, Long moss, Urn and Cord moss, *Catharinaea angustata*, *Polytrichum strictum*, and tree moss – in every division common to the northeastern United States the *Musci* order here was represented.

On rotting logs, at the foot of trees, in parasitical clumps upon the trunks, and on the ground as a soft carpet of damp green – everywhere was moss. With its perpetual damp and shade and its moist sea air, the island seemed to present strangely perfect conditions for this plant.

The wood was silent about me now, and occasionally, when the tessellation of verdure above became less dense, I could see the light of the sky. As I went deeper, the trees seemed to take definite positions in the forest about me, to form long, dark corridors with winding turns. The mosses lost their dark greenish hue and developed into a bluish yellow in the gloom. The air was moist and warm. It weighed heavily upon my lungs. The island, it appeared, was infested with blue jays, jays strangely fat and over-nourished. Great flocks of them rose up at my approach, their screaming cries filtering slowly through the sodden air like the wails of a thousand drowning cats.

But as I went farther and farther, even they disappeared, and I was left with only the walls of trees, the floor of moss and the gloom. I saw more varieties now: Shaggy moss, Hooked moss, and Hair-capped moss. Yellowish plants, they were, sickly and flaccid in the half light.

At random I chose one of the corridors through the trees and made my way slowly forward, my steps velvety in the soft grasses. Winding, yet ever going deeper into the interior, the walled lane stretched before me like a gallery. The intertanglement of foliage far above was heavy and dense, admitting no light but only a strange green glow.

It was a quarter after four by my watch when I reached a point where the trees opened abruptly onto a little glade. Roughly estimating this to be about the heart, the centre of the island, I was about to turn and retrace my steps when a mass of white at the far side of the open space caught my eye. I stepped forward and found myself gazing at a great circle of densely packed White Moss. For some moments I stood there, looking down at the cushion-like tufts.

The species I had recognized as *Leucobryum glaucum*, a *Musci* plant common enough in moist woods, but for some reason, whether because of its contrast to the green and yellow moss on all sides or the anemic pallor of its gray whiteness, I viewed it here with a feeling of utter revulsion. There was something repulsive about the very way it sprawled across the glade.

During all this time, with the enthusiasm of exploration, I had almost forgotten my finding of the liquid in the limestone cavity. Now, however, I felt a sudden desire to prove to myself beyond a doubt that the solution really was *Muscivol*, by observing how this moss plant would react to a few drops. Quickly I unfastened my knapsack, drew forth the thermos bottle, and unscrewed the cap. Then carefully tilting it over the matted circle of white moss, I let a small amount of the brownish liquid fall.

The result was amazing. The plant quivered a half moment, then shot upward with terrific growth rate. Unconsciously I jumped back. My foot caught in a bramble, I lost my balance and fell full length. The thermos bottle bounced from my hand, rolled across the ground straight into the White Moss plant, and there the viscous contents began to pour forth.

With a cry of dismay I realized what had happened. A quart of *Muscivol* was upon the plant, a quart where a few drops had been multipotent. A great shudder ran through the moss. A sobbing sigh came from its grasses. And then with a roar, the rootlets gouged down into the ground, tore at the soil, and the plant with a mighty hiss raced upward, five feet, ten feet. The tendrils swelled as though filled with pressure, became fat, octopus folds. Like the undulations of some titanic marine plant the white coils waved and lashed the air. Up they lunged, the growth rate multiplied ten thousand times.

A tentacle in its mad gyrations brushed my face. I turned to the wood and ran – down the long corridors, through the trees. Behind me the roar rose into a great thunder; the hissing stabbed the air like escaping steam. On through the dark woods I raced. Looking over my shoulder, I could see the white moss with coils like cables now, climbing over the trees, advancing with frightful velocity. Muscivol! What chemical was this that could destroy the very laws of nature? A great wail rose up as a thousand terrified blue jays flapped away in a mad heira for safety. The forest was endless. Miles I seemed to have run, but I tore on even faster toward the cliff.

At length I reached it, emerged into the open air, but found the day not as I had left it. A heavy fog had rolled in from the sea, had thrown a veil over the entire coast.

I did not stop. To the rear the wall of white was lunging over the island now like a tidal wave. Came the repercussions of the crashing of trees, snapping under the great weight of the moss. The growth fulminations pounded against my ear drums. Along the cliff, through the thickening fog, I ran. And suddenly a fearful thought came to me. Suppose the boatman had not returned?

Again I looked back. With frightful rapidity the advancing moss was gaining on me. Like an octopus the tentacles were clawing the sky, engulfing the whole island. And now the ground beneath my feet, torn and ruptured by the distant moss roots, began to shake in cataclysmic convulsions.

But at length I reached the break in the cliff where I had made my ascent from the beach. I ran to the edge and peered over. The boat was there! Through the haze of the fog I could see it drawn up on the sand, the boatman waiting. I leaped to the jags in the rock sides and began my descent.

How I ever reached the bottom I don't know. I remember running wildly across the beach to the boat, climbing in, and shouting something unintelligible to the boatman. And then we were out on the water, heading into the fog, the cool salt air fanning my face.

I came to my senses finding the old man chafing my wrists. 'What in thunder happened?' he asked.

I stood up in the rocking boat. Vaguely, through the haze I could see the great bulk of the island a half mile to our lea.

'That moss!' I cried, 'that wall of white moss! Don't you see it?'

He stared over the water, squinting his eyes. 'Moss?' he repeated slowly. 'Did you say moss?' and he turned to me with a queer look.

'I don't see no moss,' he said. 'All I can see is fog, white fog.'

CARNABY'S FISH

Mr Jason Carnaby was a man of medium height, medium features, and medium habits. At forty-six he was one of those bachelors who, having passed from youth well into middle age, would have attracted no comment other than a casual query as to why he had never married. He operated a small real-estate business with rather shabby offices in the town of La Plante and, with the exception of a stenographer who came in two days a week, he worked quite alone.

Inasmuch as La Plante was located near the Atlantic coast, much of his business had to do with shore property, summer homes and cottages. These holdings moved fairly fast, but occasionally he acquired a home which refused to attract a buyer.

Of all these, the Dumont place was undoubtedly the most difficult to move. While it was listed as 'shore property', it was actually on Philip's Lake, a short distance inland. It was part of an estate which had passed through probate, old Captain Dumont having died more than five years ago. Since that time it had had but one occupant, a Dr Septimus Levaseur, who had lived there almost a year and a half before his death, which had come about suddenly and somewhat obscurely.

The death of the doctor, who had been an amiable fellow, if somewhat distant and hazy at times, had given rise to some of the rumors which had become attached to the Dumont place and made it so difficult to sell or rent.

Dr Levaseur had died of a heart attack, apparently brought on by over-exertion. He had been found on the East road the night of a big storm half-clad, a crucifix clutched in his hand. Mr Carnaby, who was the soul of the conventional, had always regarded the doctor as somewhat queer, but, in final analysis, Mr Carnaby's judgment was circumscribed by the question of rent, and Dr Levaseur had always paid his rent promptly.

Nevertheless, his strange death had doubtless been the basis

for the rumors that there was something odd about the house, that the whole property was damned, and that finally Philip's Lake was 'queer'. Mr Carnaby was admittedly at a loss as to how these stories had got started; the circumstance of Dr Levasseur's having been found clasping a crucifix and but half-clad on the East road might have excited the superstitious, but Mr Carnaby failed to discover how the lake came to be implicated. Since other property in Mr Carnaby's hands adjoined the lake, he was irritated, lest some stigma similar to that attaching to the Dumont place should likewise become attached to other properties. He made some effort to isolate rumors concerning Philip's Lake, and finally got down to two basic tales.

Three cottage residents on the opposite shore from the Dumont place said that a small area of water far out toward the center of Philip's Lake was frequently rough and white-capped, when not a breath of wind was stirring. Mr Carnaby's very reasonable suggestion that the lake might be connected to the ocean by underground channels opening off from the vicinity of the disturbed area was brushed aside. The cottagers countered with an additional tale to the effect of a pale light or a shimmering radiance which sometimes wafted over the lake like a will-o'-the-wisp. And finally, old John Bainley told of hearing on several occasions a melodious singing far out from shore, singing which was so wonderfully lovely he wanted to swim out to it, though he hadn't been in the water 'for nigh unto sixty years'. Whatever the source of these old wives' tales, they played their part in the failure of the Dumont house to attract a renter.

After repeated efforts to dispose of the property, all of which came to nothing, Mr Carnaby decided one morning in July that something final should be done about the Dumont place. Accordingly, he gave the keys of his office to his stenographer, hitched his horse to the buckboard, and headed down the East road.

In due time he reached Gail's Corners, where he rested the horse and refreshed himself with a soft drink at the settlement's only store, through the display windows of which he could see across the summer landscape to the circle of drab gray water which was Philip's Lake. He knew that this body of water was only by courtesy called a lake, for it was merely a small quay

from which on occasion a neck of water afforded an outlet to the Atlantic.

As he stood there, gazing out at its surface, it occurred to him that he had never, after all, actually examined the lake; that is, he had not gone out on it, though he handled property touching upon it on all sides. There was something strangely melancholy and at the same time soberly attractive about Philip's Lake, and it might well be worth while to row out on to it, provided the flat-bottomed rowboat which had always lain along the shore of the Dumont place was still there. At the same time, it might not be amiss to idle away a little time in fishing, a recreation for which Mr Carnaby had found all too little time. Acting on this impulse, he bought a cane pole, a spool of line, and several varieties of artificial bait, and resumed his journey.

He reached the property at length: an old style Cape Cod house, rectangular in shape, with a narrow veranda and an acre of surrounding ground. It seemed, as he stood in the weed-grown yard, that the house had a detached look, as if in some way it did not belong there. Gazing at the lake again, he had the rather uncomfortable impression that it too had been superimposed upon the landscape like a double exposure photograph. He entered the house and went through the building room by room, making notes on the back of an old envelope as to repairs that should be made, their approximate cost and other items.

Finished, he locked the door and passed down the path toward the lake. A dozen yards from the house stood a stone well with a pagoda roof over it. At the shore he mused for some time over an old harpoon which Captain Dumont apparently had cast there in an idle moment. The weapon reminded him that Captain Dumont had served on a whaler in his younger days.

The flat-bottomed rowboat was still there. Mr Carnaby bailed out the rain water with some effort, threw his new fishing tackle across the thwart and pushed out on to the lake. On the water the impression that the closely-wooded shores were somehow out of proportion came again, and he took off his spectacles and rubbed them with a polishing cloth. He began to feel that he had come here not of his own will but in response to an indefinable and growing attraction emanating from the

depths of the green waves. What a queer creature man is, Mr Carnaby thought, to create a fascination for the unpleasant. He thrust away a desire to leap overboard and, with an effort, began to arrange his tackle.

For an hour he fished. Having no leader, he fastened the plug directly to the line and proceeded to throw the bait as far out as he could with the aid of the pole, and then jerk it gently along through the water.

Tiring of his fruitless efforts at length, and wanting to rest his eyes from the glare of the sunlight on the water, Mr Carnaby leaned back and lowered his lids. The day was drowsy, and so, too was he. When he awoke, the sun had gone down and the gloom of late twilight was dropping upon the lake. In his boat, Mr Carnaby was far out from shore, drifting aimlessly.

Indeed, he was approximately in the center of the lake, and a little wind was rippling the water there. Suddenly conscious of the time, Mr Carnaby took up the oars and began to row hard. It did not occur to him that his fish-pole was propped under one thwart with the line trailing behind the boat in the water until in the half-darkness he saw the pole abruptly bend almost double. He barely had time to grab it and pull with all his strength.

The fish came through the water slowly, heavily. As it drew closer, Carnaby could sense rather than see it weaving to and fro in the black water, not so much struggling to free itself as reluctant to come with the line, though his catch did not seem to come willingly. It was somewhat awkward to handle the cane-pole in his cramped quarters, but at last Carnaby got his catch alongside, and reached down to complete his capture.

His first impression was that he had caught a catfish. His second was of something so infinitely more horrible that an involuntary exclamation of horror escaped him.

But the twilight, surely, played his eyes tricks. He had now laid his pole down, and still holding the line, though with uncertain eyes averted from his catch, he slipped a small flashlight from his pocket, switched it on, and turned the comparatively feeble ray onto his catch.

A woman's head drifted there, looking up at him – an exquisite feminine face with long blond hair trailing in the water, which, rippling over the countenance white in that dark-

ness, revealed teeth bared in an expression of unutterable malignance. The barbs of one of the gang hooks had bitten deep into the red mouth, and from it flowed a thin stream of blood.

It was alive, a perfectly moulded human head – but the body was that of a fish, with tail and fins!

For several seconds Mr Carnaby sat frozen to immobility. Then the flashlight slipped from his hands; he dropped the line and began to row wildly for shore.

He beached the boat and staggered unsteadily up the path. When he reached the house he halted breathlessly, overcome by nervous reaction. The shadow of his patiently waiting horse and buckboard loomed beyond the gate, but in spite of this bewildering horror, he did not feel up to driving the lonely road back just yet. He climbed the stoop, inserted his key into the lock with trembling hands, and re-entered the house.

The stillness of the long-closed interior closed about him like a cloak, soothing his troubled nerves. He lit a lamp, carried it into the living room and placed it on the table. Then he got out his pipe and began to smoke slowly and deliberately.

Was he mad, he wondered, or was the thing he had seen only the after-effect of a latent dream? Had he witnessed some phantasmagoria, created by water and darkness which his numbed senses had reformed into a vagary of the subconscious? One thing was certain. Tell his experience to the townsfolk of La Plante, and he might as well write a no-sale ticket for the property. Once such a story got around, no amount of advertising would be able to overcome the superstitious aura that had already begun to gather around the Dumont place.

It came to him that certain rumors concerning Dr Levaseur and his strange death had been bruited about with raised eyebrows – vague, formless whisperings. Certainly the man had been odd, and the oddity of his character was brought home to Carnaby now as he looked upon the room in which he stood.

The walls had been done over in a shade of bluish green that was dark and cheerless. The rug was a light brown, and the border design resembled thick layers of pebbles interlaced with sand. On one wall was an old print of Heinrich Heine; near it hung a faded etching of a sailing vessel in a storm; and in one corner stood a bookcase filled with large and heavy volumes.

Still smoking and somewhat calmer now, Mr Carnaby

crossed to the books. *Loreleysage in Dichtung und Musik. Mysteries of the Sea*, by Cornelius Van de Mar. *The History of Atlantis*, by Lewis Spence. As he stood looking at these titles, Carnaby became aware again, by a process of idea-association, of the nature of Dr Levaseur's curious obsession. He was instantly apprehensive again, and curiously disturbed, for his memory brought back vividly that strange and horrible experience on the lake.

Dr Levaseur had claimed to be an authority on loreleis, on marine lures of legend and mythology, and he had written several papers on these old beliefs. Surely these were somewhere available, thought Carnaby. Yet he was briefly reluctant to look for them, a little afraid of what he might find. However, after but a few moments of hesitation, he set about searching for Dr Levaseur's papers among the publications in the bookcase, and in a short time found a thick sheaf of dusty foolscap, closely written in a fine precise hand.

This he carried to a chair and read.

At first, in his nervous haste, he found it difficult to keep his attention to the pages, but gradually the brooding silence of the house drifted out of his consciousness. He read for an hour, and at the end of that time he sat back in silent amazement. Dr Levaseur had apparently been not only an authority on loreleis and ancient allied folklore, but he had also been versed in a myriad of psychic phenomena which had any kind of marine background. And, incredible as it seemed, the doctor apparently had accepted many of these tales as factual accounts.

He had written at some length the account of the Tsiang Lora siren which hardened Dutch sailors had reported dwelt near an islet off the southeast coast of Java. Seen only at night, cloaked in bluish-white radiance, this siren, like her many mythological counterparts, took the form of a woman, lovely and ethereal, whose whispered plea for help drifted across the water with all the power of a lodestone. Dr Levaseur had added to this narrative the factual results of several geodetic surveys made by the Netherlands East Indies Hydrographical Department, pointing out that the sea floor at this point of latitude and longitude sloped sharply upward and formed a shallow reef or submerged tableland. In addition, the doctor recounted the foundering of a Dutch brigantine near this location in the early

sixties. This ship had carried a passenger, a rich Malay woman, who was suspected of being a priestess of the *dularna* sect.

He had carefully chronicled the tale of Dabra Khan in the Arabian Gulf, a masculine lorelei who supposedly shouted false commands in the helmsman's ears during a storm; of McClannon's Folly, a needle spire of rock off the Cornish coast which changed to a voluptuous maiden clinging to a spar when viewed through a lane of fog, each case described with scholarly directness.

But toward the end of the manuscript there was an underlined paragraph that Mr Carnaby read several times.

It is now four months since I have come here. Yesterday I went out upon Philip's Lake for the first time, and I know now that I was not wrong in my judgment. It is there, it called out to me, and for a moment I thought I saw it in all its malevolent beauty.

I cannot wait until I have seen it again. Tomorrow, taking full precautions, and using all the powers at my disposal, I shall strive to entice it from its lair. The desire is almost overwhelming.

Mr Carnaby sat looking off into space for a long time. At length he put his pipe into his pocket and returned the manuscript to the bookcase. He blew out the lamp and made his way out of the house to the buckboard. He was in deep, perturbed thought as he drove slowly home.

Thereafter, Mr Carnaby made no further attempt to find a renter for the Dumont place. He filed the deed and abstract away in an old shoebox, marked: *Miscellaneous N.G.*, and he went about his business, saying nothing to anyone about his experience on the lake.

In this manner fall passed into winter, and the town of La Plante went about its routine in its usual fashion. It was the following spring, a balmy day in early May, that Mr Carnaby chanced to meet his old friend, Lawyer Herrick, as the latter was emerging from the courthouse.

'Well, how's business?' Herrick inquired politely, accepting Mr Carnaby's cigar. 'Should be a run on shore property this summer, what with that new pike cut through from Kenleyville.'

'Yes, there should,' Mr Carnaby agreed.

'I see you've got the Dumont place rented again,' Herrick continued. 'I thought you would in time. It's a nice place.'

Mr Carnaby looked at the lawyer sharply. 'Why no, it's not rented. What ever made you think it was?'

Herrick flicked his cigar ash into the wind and frowned slightly. 'I drove by there yesterday, and I thought I saw a woman sitting on the shore, sunning herself. A woman with blond hair.'

'Is that so?' said the real estate man. 'That's odd.'

It was so odd that he decided to visit the property the next day. He could, he told himself, kill two birds with one stone. A tenant farther down the East road had complained of a bad roof, and Mr Carnaby had put off for some time the task of inspecting it.

When he turned into the lane leading to the Dumont house, Mr Carnaby cast a quick glance at the shore. The westering sun was in his eyes, and the fire-like reflection from one of the windows blinded him, but for a moment he fancied he saw a woman sitting on the shore. But at second glance, somewhat out of range of the sun's reflection, he saw nothing; the place bore the unmistakable appearance of desertion – not alone the house, in its aloof desolation, but all the land belonging to it.

Mr Carnaby opened the house and went into the living room. With all his experience in entering long-closed houses, he could never repress the initial spell of depression which swept over him as his nostrils caught the smell of dust and stale air. Nothing was changed from his visit of six months before. Yet he had, however, curiously, expected change; the casual suggestion inherent in Herrick's brief conversation had affected him most disagreeably; it had caused him to think again of that horrible experience on the lake, of Dr Levaseur's pursuits and death, of the tales concerning the Dumont place.

He lit the lamp, for daylight was fading outside, and already the room was hazed with early twilight. He lit his pipe, too, and as usual, the tobacco smoke soothed him somewhat. Now that he was here, his thoughts returned again to Dr Levaseur's manuscript; he took it from the bookcase where he had left it, and sat down to glance through it again. This time, however, he could find no attraction in the written words – the paragraphs seemed stilted, disconnected, even absurd. Nevertheless, cold

as he remained to Dr Levaseur's thesis of the reality of loreleis and similar creatures, he was most unpleasantly impressed by the scholarly, almost dryly erudite weight of evidence which the doctor had adduced to sustain certain half-hinted beliefs. And there was that curious reference to 'something' in Philip's Lake.

Something like an hour passed before he heard the singing. Even then he was hardly aware of it, so soft was the voice and so far off. But presently he looked up from the manuscript and listened. Almost at the limit of his hearing range it sounded, the overtones blending into the sighing of the wind.

Definitely it was a woman's voice, singing a strange lilting melody. It grew louder, and, despite an apprehensive hesitation, Carnaby strode to the window and opened it. It was a song such as he had never heard before, sung in a contralto, wandering up and down the octaves in an aimless yet appealing way. Through the window he could see no living person, only the shadowy lombardies that marched down the slope to the shore of the lake.

The singing grew louder until it seemed to resound from the walls of the room. And now as he listened, Mr Carnaby experienced a strange sensation. It was as if every nerve and fiber of his body responded to that voice and urged him to go to its source. It was a lure, and with his bucolic matter-of-factness the real estate man unconsciously fought it with all his will.

He might as well have been fastened to a steel cable. Step by step he found himself drawn across the room to the door and out on to the veranda. There he halted again, all but overcome by that voice.

On feet that were dead things Mr Carnaby strode down the steps and down the path. He passed the well and continued to the shore of the lake. Black water rippled at his feet.

And then he saw her. She was twenty yards from shore, waist deep in the water, moving slowly toward him. In the moonlight he could see her carmine lips as she sang her golden song. He could see her dripping tresses coiling about her nude shoulders. On she came, and still he stood there transfixed, held by some alien power.

Suddenly the singing ceased. Mr Carnaby felt something snap in his consciousness like a clipped wire. The woman was

directly before him now, and as she advanced, the lower portion of her body came clear of the water. A greenish scaled body edged with white. The body of a fish! The head and breasts were those of a woman, but even as he watched, he saw that head bloat and swell, lose its features, change to a horrible reptilian mass that gazed upon him with diabolic fury!

He turned, the spell broken, and the thing lunged toward him, seeming to move through the air. Down the beach Mr Carnaby ran, a mighty horror assailing him, but his steps were turned to lead. Then, even as he faltered, he caught the glint of moonlight on a shaft in the sand. Old Captain Dumont's harpoon.

Driven by the wild impulse to save himself, he bent down, seized it and turned to face the monster. His heart stood still. There it was directly before him, an horrendous, loathsome beast with slaving lips and blazing, hyalescent eyes. It closed in, and as it did, Mr Carnaby drove the harpoon before him with every ounce of strength he possessed. He felt the stinging recoil, but whether it was merely his arm reaching the limit of its range he did not know. Things became vague and indistinct for Mr Carnaby then. A piercing scream seared into his ears. The monster wavered and sank backward. Then, uttering low, mewling cries, it turned and scrabbled down the beach. Simultaneously the surface of the black lake seemed to rear upward and boil in a great cauldron of lashing waves and foam.

The thing reeled into the water. Twenty yards from shore it fell forward like a spent juggernaut. For a moment it lay there, body awash, heaving up and down. Then slowly it sank from sight.

Mr Carnaby spent eleven days in the La Plante hospital under the close surveillance of his physician. Upon his release, he forced himself, however reluctantly, to return to the Dumont place and make a thorough investigation. He found the harpoon on the beach, where he had left it; he found also the indentations of his footprints. He found nothing more. Moreover, the house seemed exceedingly pleasant, even inviting. He could discover but one somewhat odd fact, and this mattered hardly at all — the report of the governmental meteorological station at the county seat nine miles east stated that, from May seventh to May sixteenth inclusive, wind velocities in the La

Plante district were at the lowest point they had been for the entire year. Yet, during that time Philip's Lake remained in a turbulent state, white-capped and sullen with angry waves.

The effect of all this was to inspire Mr Carnaby with the conviction that, in time, the Dumont place might after all be made to pay. He paid it another visit and found nothing altered; he took time to make a few repairs and had the house cleaned up a little. In a fortnight he managed to find a young couple who wanted the house, and rented it forthwith.

He waited uneasily for several weeks for any word of trouble, but nothing came from the Dumont place but the rent, with pleasant regularity, and presently Mr Carnaby began to look back upon his experience as a kind of neurotic condition which had given him unhealthy hallucinations.

It was ten months before he visited Gail's Corners again. On that occasion he had to pay a visit to the village doctor concerning a property he was handling for him. He found the doctor just back from the country, offered him a cigar, and lit one for himself.

'It's a coincidence seeing you, Carnaby,' said Dr Holmes. 'I've just come from one of your tenants – and I need a drink, bad. Just get that bottle and the glasses from that cupboard, will you?'

Carnaby did so, his eyebrows raised. 'Which tenants?'

'The Plaisiers. They're on the Dumont place.'

A ball of alarm exploded inside Carnaby; he sat down, feeling his mouth going dry. 'Nothing wrong, is there?'

'Wrong? God knows what you'd call it, Carnaby.' He shook his head and poured himself a drink. 'I delivered her baby all right – usually have trouble with the first, you know – but I didn't have any trouble with the delivery. But the baby! My God, Carnaby! – I never saw a baby that looked so much like a fish in all my life!'

He poured a drink for Carnaby and looked up to hand it to him. He was not across the desk from him where but a moment before he had been. Quietly, without a sound, Mr Carnaby had fainted.

THE KING AND THE KNAVE

The man accosted Sargent at the intersection of Charing Cross and Oxford Street. He was tall, with a long black rain-cape, an oddly-shaped alpine hat, and a cane. He said:

'I beg pardon, sir. But do you play cards?'

Sargent turned up his collar against the drizzle and shivered. For an hour he had known he was being followed. From Russell Square to the British Museum to Dyott Street, while fog swept steadily in from the Embankment, he had gradually increased his pace, aware of the muffled steps behind.

'Cards?' he asked. 'What do you mean?'

The man extended a claw-like hand. 'I am Doctor Paul Losada. You have perhaps heard of me . . .'

A little shock darted up Sargent's spine.

' . . . And you are Basil Sargent, the man who won thirty thousand pounds at Monte Carlo, who broke the bank at Wang Tau's in Singapore, playing *main-po* three years ago. In short, you are, unless I am mistaken, the most well-informed person on games of chance in London at the present time.'

'I am Basil Sargent, yes,' Sargent replied coldly.

'Then, *Señor*' – the stranger's pallid face seemed to swirl uncertainly in the fog – 'may I ask a favor of you? I live but a short distance from here. Would you do me the honor of coming to my apartment? My wife and I are looking for a fourth at whist. But more than that, I have something I would like to show you, something which I believe you will appreciate more than anyone else.'

'And what,' Sargent asked uneasily, 'do you wish to show me?'

A gleam leaped into the man's black eyes. 'A deck of cards, *Señor*, bearing neither hearts, clubs, spades, nor diamonds – the strangest and perhaps the oldest deck in existence.'

Sargent was expecting another answer, and his relief in not

getting it left him cold for a moment. For a long time he stood there in silence. Then he smiled. Losada, eh? Inez Losada's impossible husband. The man must take him for a fool.

But why not? The situation which, to a less handsome, less confident man, might have loomed dangerous seemed only amusing to the gambler.

'I'll go,' he said.

Rumbling down Charing Cross, their cab turned right at Old Compton Street and headed into Soho. Doctor Losada's residence was on Rupert Street, a huge stone pile that seemed to shrink back despondently in the shadows.

The doctor led the way down a gas-lit corridor to a door on the second floor back. Inside, he disappeared for a moment, then returned, followed by a man and a woman.

'My wife, Inez,' he said. 'Her brother, Ricardo.'

Sargent bowed. 'I have met the *Señora* once before,' he smirked. 'Wasn't it at Covent Garden?'

She was black-haired and strikingly beautiful, and there was a ghost of a smile about her reddened lips as she replied:

'Perhaps. I go to the opera frequently.'

Doctor Losada opened a card table, placed four chairs around it.

'We will begin with whist,' he said. 'But first let me show you the cards.'

He opened a small ivory box, took out a deck and spread it on the table top.

Sargent stared.

For twenty years as a professional card sharp he had earned his living by his wits. For twenty years he had wandered from city to city, winning games of chance by his own trickery and cunning, taking fortunes from the gullible. But never had he seen a deck like the one before him.

As Losada had said, the suits were distinguished by neither hearts, diamonds, clubs, nor spades. The two black suits were snakes and harpies, with a knave, a queen, a king, and ten pip-cards, including an ace. The two red suits were the same, except that their markings were spiders and moonflowers. In spite of the cards' apparent age, they were in remarkably preserved condition.

But the most unusual of all was the joker. The very presence

of this card seemed to constrict Sargent's lungs with a feeling of suffocation. Blackly marked on a white surface, it showed a small skull, a death's-head.

'Where did you get them?' Sargent asked, looking up.

Doctor Losada smiled. 'The pack was sent me by a friend in Seville. As it happened, they were almost lost before they arrived.'

'Lost?'

'They were sent by plane,' Losada explained. 'The pilot was stricken ill, en route to Croydon, and the ship crashed. Only part of the mail was recovered.'

Losada now took the deck and shuffled it. 'High card deals,' he said, motioning Sargent to draw.

Sargent drew the knave and laid it down before him. And then a curious coincidence occurred. Losada's wife, Inez, drew the queen. Losada took the king. Knave, queen, king in direct rotation. Ricardo's card was a low number.

Losada cut and began to deal. A moment later play started. The game was a close one, and for a while, although there were no stakes, Sargent's old interest held him to each move. Gradually, however, other thoughts began to invade his brain, and he took and lost tricks mechanically.

Did Doctor Losada know him by name only? Had he chosen him for a fourth simply because he desired a person of his reputation to examine his antique deck?

Or was he aware of the clandestine affair between Sargent and the *Señora*, Inez? Did the doctor know that during the many nights his practice took him from his apartment, Sargent had visited his wife in secret?

There was no doubt that Inez was a beautiful woman. Her eyes were large. Her skin was like tinted satin, and her figure, as she sat there, was little concealed by her low-cut gown.

In the center of the table, next to the trump card, the joker still lay, face up. Looking at it, Sargent again got the impression that something about the card was affecting his breathing. It seemed as if an invisible dust fog were passing from that tiny death's-head into his nostrils.

The game centered down to the last trick. Again that coincidence occurred. Sargent's card was the knave. Inez played the queen, and Losada without the slightest show of emotion

took the trick with his king. Once more rotation had been knave, queen, king – with king the winner.

At one a.m. Sargent took his leave. He expressed his thanks and pleasure for the evening. But as he descended to the street, some inner urge prompted him to look back over his shoulder.

Rupert Street lay dark and deserted, with only an occasional street lamp to light the oldish buildings on either side. But directly above the apartment he had just left, a solid, compact cloud-mass hung low in the night sky. He shuddered. For as he looked, it seemed to Sargent that that cloud bore the same design as the joker card of Losada's deck, and that something, dry and smothering like smoke, was creeping down from the death's-head in the heavens into his lungs.

The telephone in his Bloomsbury hotel woke Sargent early next morning.

'This is Doctor Losada,' came the voice on the wire. 'I'm sorry to trouble you again, but after you left last night I was unable to locate one of the cards of my deck. I desire very much to keep that deck intact, and I am wondering if you would mind looking to see if it attached itself unnoticed to your clothes.'

'Just a minute,' Sargent said.

He opened his wardrobe closet, searched quickly through the clothes he had worn the previous evening. In the rain-jacket, in the torn lower hem – sure enough, there was the card, the knave of snakes.

'The card is here,' he said into the phone. 'I'll mail it to you at once, doctor.'

'Why not bring it yourself, *Señor*? Say tonight at nine, and we can have another game.'

That night Sargent again stood before the gloomy corridor door of Doctor Losada's apartment on Rupert Street. All day the events of the night before had lingered in his brain, troubling him. Try though he would to fight it off, a distinct sense of terror seemed closing in on him. He felt as if he were gradually being drawn into a web from which he could not keep away, and from which there was no escape.

No response came to his pull at the bell. He tried the latch, opened the door and entered. The apartment was lighted but empty. Then he saw the note on the table.

Señor Sargent:

A thousand pardons, but neither my wife, Ricardo nor I will be able to be with you at the agreed hour. An urgent matter has come up, requiring our presence elsewhere.

You may amuse yourself, if you wish, until we return, with the cards. They are in the lower right compartment of the wall cabinet.

Losada

Sargent scowled and nervously lighted a cigarette. He turned toward the door. But the desire to view that deck once more became overpowering.

A moment later, hat and coat removed, he opened the little ivory box and took out the cards. In the droning solitude of the room he shuffled and re-shuffled — then mechanically began to play solitaire.

There are many ways to play solitaire. Sargent's game was quite simple. A cross was made of five cards. On the cross, cards were played in *down* rotation without regard to suit. The corner cards finished out the square and were played upon in *up* rotation, according to suit. The object was to build these corners into complete sets of thirteen each.

Rapidly he played. He was on the verge of winning when he saw that his last card, the queen, could not be played. The king had gone into the discard pile, and he was unable to retrieve it.

He shuffled and tried again. But at the end of half an hour he stood again blocked. In three games, each with the queen in the corner, a king prevented him from winning.

Sargent felt a bead of cold sweat stand out on his brow. Terror, an invisible, nameless thing, seemed to rise from the pasteboards in his hands and close about him like a winding sheet.

Impulsively and for no definite reason he could think of at the moment he swept the cards together, jammed them into the ivory box and placed the box in his pocket. Puzzled at his action, yet lacking the will power to change it, he took up his hat and coat and went out.

An hour later he was back in his Bloomsbury rooms, ner-

vously downing a glass of brandy. The liquor quieted him somewhat, and he slumped into a chair, picked up a book and tried to read.

But the print swam before his eyes. Questions unanswerable hammered at him. Knave, queen, king. In all his experience at card playing, never had Sargent seen those three cards turn up in such chronological succession. It was weird!

He stirred restlessly. A curious chill, seeming to emanate from the ceiling above, filled the room.

Could it be possible that there was any significance in those cards? Did, for example, the queen represent Inez, the king Doctor Losada, and the knave himself? But no, such a thought was absurd.

At length Sargent tossed his book aside, undressed and went to bed.

It seemed he had but fallen asleep when he awoke, sat bolt upright, trembling in every nerve and muscle. The room was black as pitch, and there was no sound save the far-away rumble of a distant tram-car. He listened.

Faintly there came to his ears a low rustling, a scraping as of objects brushing against each other in frantic haste. It grew louder, died away.

Sargent leaped out of bed, snapped on the wall switch, flooding the room with light.

There was no one before him. The room was empty. And then, with a start, he found himself staring down at the table.

Ripped from its hinges as if by some internal force, the cover of the ivory box lay open. And Losada's deck of cards! They were arranged on the table in a partly completed game of solitaire. More than that, a chair was drawn up, though Sargent was positive none had been there before.

It was as if everything had been prepared for him to play.

Slowly he moved forward. The corner cards were queens. Three corners had been built to the trey, but the last was still vacant.

Once again that overpowering urge swept over him. A definite psychic power drew him into the chair, moved his hands irresistibly toward the cards.

He began to move through the deck, playing slowly. The game wore on, and a vague horror began to rise within him.

The king! It was his unseen opponent. Like a hunted thing, jeering at his efforts, it remained unattainable in the discard pile.

Suddenly the telephone rang. Sargent lifted the instrument. 'Yes?'

A voice filled with triumph and mockery came over the wire. 'This is Doctor Losada. Listen carefully, for what I have to say will be of interest to you.

'Please do not think our recent meeting was a matter of chance. I have known you, watched you for the past four months. I sought you out, not because of your reputation as a gambler – but because of my wife.

'My wife, yes. Did you think your intrigue with her could escape me unnoticed? Ah no, *Señor*. Doctor Losada is not that much of a fool. You have robbed me of the thing I prize most, and I have planned my revenge.

'Are you listening? You are now seated at a table, playing cards. My cards. It is not an ordinary deck, as you have perhaps guessed. It was fashioned by a Spanish sorcerer in the Fourteenth Century.

'Play your game of solitaire, *Señor*. Play with all the skill you possess. The card which represents you in the deck is the knave of snakes. The queen is Inez, my wife. *The king is myself.*

'Watch the king. Your only salvation is to defeat it with your knave. *Adios, Señor.*'

The phone clicked, and Sargent sat there, staring. Slowly he forked the instrument, picked up the cards. The words that had come over the wire were etched like fire in his brain.

But suddenly he laughed. Knave was he? Very well, as knave he would steal the queen and laugh in the king's face. With trembling fingers he began to move through the deck. Upon the tray he played in quick succession the four, the five, the six. The discard pile was lessening.

On and on he played. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead as he marshaled his forces. He was closing in on the king, and he was utilizing all of his skill to accomplish it.

A hiss of satisfaction came to his lips. Remained but one card to be played, and he would win.

And then a wave of horror billowed over him. The king card

was moving, rising of its own accord from the discard pile. And as it moved, the card beneath slid out and fell upon the table directly beneath Sargent's gaze.

The joker!

He had forgotten it. Now as he sat staring at that leering death's-head that same horrible sense of suffocation seized him. His throat closed tight; his eyes bulged. It was as though an invisible poisonous miasma was floating from that painted skull, crawling into his lungs like a bulbous thing alive. He was choking. Choking . . .

He screamed and lurched to his feet. Gasping, he tore at his throat.

The joker card seemed to leave the table, to float before his eyes. He clawed at the rug, sucked wildly for air.

But gradually and relentlessly blackness closed in on him, and he felt his life ebb away.

The *London Morning Post* carried the following item the next day:

An unfortunate tragedy occurred last night in a room of a Bloomsbury hotel. Mr Basil Sargent, who won lasting fame by his unusual winnings at Baccarat at Monte Carlo, was found dead, apparently of asphyxiation.

Investigation showed that the room's gas fixture had been left turned on.

Police place no credence in the rumor that a man dressed in a black rain-cape stole into the hotel and entered the dead man's room some time after he retired.

COSMIC TELETYPE

Joseph Rane was not a scientist in any sense of the word, neither was he a highly educated man, though the villagers at Granite Point generally considered him so. Five years before, when he was finishing his sophomore year at the University of Minnesota, he had accidentally driven his car through the bridge rail at Hastings, and as a result had been forced to end his studies.

Physicians, patching him together, had accomplished what the newspapers termed a miracle. It had been found necessary to remove a section of his brain from the cranial cavity and substitute a piece of silver plate for it. During his convalescence fear was expressed that he would never be mentally normal, but on the day of his discharge a final examination plainly showed this not to be the case.

Rane had been warned, however, to avoid all nervous tension in the future. He might read, but he must read only light novels. He could work, but he must do nothing which would require any serious thought or heavy mental activity. In other words he was sane only by an act of Providence, and any strain to his brain, which had suffered a severe shock, might be fatal.

For two years the young man abided by these warnings. Then, tiring of his enforced inactivity, he promptly forgot the past and plunged into study so intense his physician would have been appalled had he been made aware of it.

I have said Rane was no scientist, that he was not a highly educated man. He had, however, those attributes which are the foundation of both: a strong desire to learn and, above all, an almost feverish obsession to experiment.

Then without the necessary background, and without any single fixed objective, he began to study anything which might reasonably fall under the classification of 'scientific'. For three months he labored at mathematics, advancing by short-cut

routes of his own creation, to higher calculus and theoretical physics. Then, tiring of the abstract, he turned his attention to the vibratory scale.

Finally, as the equipment in his private laboratory began to grow in abundance, he purchased a small house near the town of Granite Point, where his experiments could be continued unhampered.

The house was a comfortable one, surrounded by a large apple orchard. In the first month at his new residence Rane both puzzled and shocked the citizens of Granite Point by blowing up every tree of this orchard with some kind of explosive. His exact method of accomplishing this was never quite known, for when his housekeeper repeated to the villagers what her employer had told her, it was thought she was more than slightly mad.

According to the housekeeper, Rane had wired each individual tree with something that was in sympathetic vibration with the wings of a bee. When the trees burst into their spring bloom and the bees came, the explosions followed.

Subsequent to the orchard incident, Rane was seen to construct a square wooden platform in the yard before his house, upon which swiftly took form a weird machine. The tax-collector who called upon him during the month of June described it as 'a mess of insulators and wheels with a dial panel that looked like a powerhouse switchboard'. Asked the purpose of this machine, Rane delivered the astounding statement that he didn't know yet. He had simply made it and was going to see what it would do.

Such events were bound to impress the citizens of Granite Point. The climax of it all came when the local radio station was found insolvent and decided to dispose of its studio and control room fixtures at public auction. Rane, driving up in his Model T Ford was the only bidder for two teletype machines with which the station had received for its listeners *News Flashes of the World*.

Loading the two heavy teletypes in his car, Rane broke all speed records driving back to his house. And after that for a period of more than two months little was seen of the man.

In his house, however, he was a dynamo of activity. First he mounted the two teletypes on a wooden bench, side by side,

There to the casual observer the instruments resembled two ordinary typewriters, with the twin paper-rolls in readiness, as if they were waiting to receive a telegraphic message. He next turned his attention to his cosmic radio.

He called it that for want of a better term. The earlier developments of this machine were lost in a frenzy of experimentation. Starting with a study of atomic power, Rane had developed a miniature atom-smasher; later he elaborated his instrument into a device of which he himself stood a little in awe.

'You see,' he said one day to his housekeeper, 'this machine as it now stands is based on a concept of the relation between time and space. It will project a ray through the fourth-dimensional continuum. In other words, when turned to a full power, it will cause a disruption of the space-time coordinates, a channel so to speak which leads from our own three-dimensional world into the fourth dimension. I am convinced that such a channel is being utilized by beings of other planets as a means of communication.'

Rane then connected the two teletypes to the machine, with a loading-coil between each. He pulled the switch, set the dynamos in action and awaited results.

Results were cataclysmic. There was a blinding flash of light, a thunderous report which shattered twelve windows in Granite Point and a hiss of flame that swept through three rooms of the house. Rane himself escaped with only burns about the face and arms, but his housekeeper rose up in righteous wrath and promptly gave notice.

May I repeat myself when I say that Rane had the brain – or at least the partial brain – of a true scientist. One failure did not disturb him in the slightest. In fact, he had rather expected it. And he fell to work at once, repairing damaged cables and connections and rewiring his entire machine.

The newly-finished product was quite different from the original version. It was, if possible, more complicated in its control panel. There was added for no definite reason a huge antenna in the outer yard which stretched from the house to a mast some hundred and fifty feet away.

Again he connected his teletypes. And on the night of the first of August everything was in readiness for his second test. I

mention the date, for it was the date of the worst electrical and wind storm that had struck Granite Point in twenty years. Outside the copper antenna and counterpoise were swaying madly in the gale. Lightning tore across the heavens to the accompaniment of an artillery of thunder.

Inside his laboratory Rane was oblivious to the storm. For two hours he had sat before the instrument panel, turning and twisting the dials. Above him a huge hourglass-shaped tube glowed orange and cherry red at intervals, but a deathlike silence hung over the two teletypes. There was only the low whine of the dynamos.

And then abruptly one of the typewriter keys of the teletype trembled and rose halfway. Feverishly, Rane readjusted the paper, turned the dials.

A moment later, with a rush and a clatter, the keys began to pound in and out, the carriage swept from right to left, and the following message came into creation on the rolled paper:

qtsf wuxz24 hkOOvey w3llmcbq bvcskha oorhg riv-
slyztuln kklmnwlf rywbsqv 3.2 ddcupj.

tcaw 5

Rane stared at these cryptic words as a wild gleam of triumph entered his eyes. Palms wet, heart pounding, he stood there, scarcely daring to breathe, but no further message was printed. Vainly he worked at the dials.

At twenty minutes past four a.m. the teletype moved into action again. But this time, though Rane was wild with excitement, its results were a bit disappointing. The same message was repeated word for word, or rather letter for letter. And thereafter silence.

Exhausted at last, Rane fell into a deep slumber. At dawn he was up again at his machine. What possibly could have been the source of that strange message he had, of course, no way of knowing. But that the events of the night before had been no dream was positively demonstrated by the paper in the roll which still showed its meaningless jumble of letters and figures.

All day he attempted to decipher that message. He put into play the 'predominant E solution' of Poe and Doyle, as the only methods he had at his disposal. Neither worked. But that

night again at five minutes past twelve and again at twenty minutes past four the first teletype resumed its clatter.

qtsf wuxz24 hkOOvey w3llmcbq yvers chtq oorhg tfc
aijbfw dpiuzqaz ywgfd bvcxzasdf wertyu.

tcaw 5

Here was a different combination of letters and figures. The first, second, third, fourth words and the seventh word were the same as in the first message, as was the last word, which seemed to be a signature of some sort.

And then Rane had an idea. Suppose, he told himself, suppose he had in actuality contacted another planet, a planet which biologically, or at least psychologically, was on a parallel with the earth. And suppose the inhabitants of this planet were utilizing the fourth dimension as a means of communication. Surely even an Einstein would agree this was but an elementary supposition.

Very well, why then would messages come through twice in rotation at five minutes past twelve and twenty minutes past four? He glanced at his own radio, and the answer came abruptly. Weather reports!

His brain swung into this channel with a rush as other thoughts followed. Since the postulated planet might – in all probability, was – beyond our Solar System, its system of keeping time would be different. There would be other suns to be-token the noon hour. A night or a day very probably might fall into the intervening time between five minutes past twelve and twenty minutes past four.

Now was he to assume that the message he had received could be transposed into English words? Such an assumption seemed impossible, and the fact that numerals as well as letters had been used seemed to indicate another means of communication entirely.

Fortified by two cups of strong coffee Rane struggled with his solution. Using the single word *weather* as a key word in as many terrestrial languages as he could call to arm, he wrote and rewrote the messages again and again.

By morning Rane had it. It was in English or an equivalent of English. It was little more than a cryptogram, with letters

and groups of letters having different meanings. Apparently the unknown operator was transmitting in a language that had English as a basis, but had phonetically changed it to suit his own conditions.

Decoded, the first message now read:

Vome, Lirius. Weather forecast. Winds abating. Atmospheric coronium content 3.2. Warmer.

Unit A.

The second message took Rane only a moment to transpose.

Vome, Lirius. Weather forecast. Northwest winds and warmer. Possible light meteorite shower.

Unit A.

Rane at this point was in a state of nervous frenzy. Sheer exhaustion forced him to go to his bed, where he remained dead to the world for six hours. But as the sun sank and darkness came, he awakened automatically to begin a new vigil at his machine.

The 12:05 message that night was very similar to previous messages, merely a weather prediction. But the 4:20 message was different.

Vome, Lirius. General emergency report. Dromeda, daughter of Calian and most beautiful woman in all Lirius, was kidnapped early today by a man thought to be Tarana, son of the King of Uranus. It is believed Tarana arrived secretly on Lirius on a space ship, traveling out of patrolled space-lanes. A council of war will be held immediately.

Unit A.

Swift on the heels of this breath-taking message, the cosmic teletype broke into action again. The keys pounded over the paper with weird rapidity.

Vome, Lirius. Report of the council of war to all peoples of Lirius. An ultimatum has been sent to the government of the planet, Uranus, demanding the return of Dromeda, plus a full indemnity. If this demand is disregarded, conscription of all able-bodied males of Lirius will begin tomorrow.

Unit A.

Barely had these words made their inked impression on the paper when another astounding event occurred. Joseph Rane, by now beyond all borders of amazement, reached quickly for the dials and adjusted them as best he could. The second teletype, silent until now, was responding to outer galactic stimuli. Slowly, as if under weight of serious consideration, the keys tapped off the message:

Geharla, Uranus. The King of Uranus informs the government of Lirius that Dromeda, betrothed by right of conquest, will be married in state to Prince Tarana in a wedding to be held tomorrow night in the light of our four moons. Any attitude other than friendly by the government of Lirius will be taken as a step toward war. In which case, we, of Uranus, will not hesitate to train our cosmic radiation towers on Lirius and annihilate her.

It was now two o'clock terrestrial time, and Joseph Rane was living on nervous energy alone. The hours that followed found the twin teletypes working almost continuously. There were threats and counter-threats between the two planets. There was a mass order for immediate mobilization on Lirius. There was a call to defense on Uranus. At three a.m. came the single insolent flash from Geharla that Prince Tarana had been married to Dromeda.

More messages while Joseph Rane's brain reeled to the potentialities. An expedition of war was leaving Lirius in space-dreadnoughts for Uranus. All threats of the cosmic radiation towers were regarded as bluff. Lirius would have its beautiful Dromeda back or perish trying.

But Rane's already over-strained brain demanded rest at this point. The scientist pulled the switch of his machine, stopping the dynamos, ate a little food and went to bed.

During the following day the teletypes were silent. He occupied his time by cutting the rolled paper messages into sheets and pasting them in a scrapbook. He worked indifferently, toying with an idea which had been growing with him for some time.

If he could receive messages from another world, why couldn't he send them in return? As matters stood now, he

knew one of the planets was Uranus, and he assumed that since the inhabitants referred to it with the same name as the people of Earth, those inhabitants must (a) have originated from Earth, or (b) be constantly aware of the scientific developments on Earth through a method known only to themselves.

At 12:05 the following flash came over the first teletype:

Vome, Lirius. The attack expedition, consisting of 25 space dreadnoughts, 6 space gun-ships, and 3 patrol discs, has reached Oberon, one of the four moons of Uranus. Landing on Uranus so far has been an impossibility, due to the cosmic radiation towers, which have been found to be an actuality. The war is now in a state of siege.

Rane frowned. Weird and bizarre as this all was, he had a feeling deep within him that it was somehow familiar. Somewhere, long ago, he was sure he had heard of the same facts, and the same conditions. And yet such a thought was impossible.

As for two-way communication, even granting that he might be able to contact either one of the two planets, using the same code, it was doubtful whether or not he would receive a reply, due to the very great excitement there.

His sympathy, he found mounting steadily in the direction of Lirius, which he guessed was the smaller planet of the two, and which, though on the offensive, had a righteous cause for indignation.

Abruptly a memory of his old school studies struck him hard – the Trojan War of Greek mythology. This was comparable to the capture of Helen of Troy, wife of Menelaus by Paris and the classical incident of the wooden horse, which had so excited his boyhood imagination.

Joseph Rane sat down before the first teletype, threw over the switch and adjusted a control knob. An instant later he began pounding out a message.

To Vome, Lirius. From Joseph Rane, Granite Point, Earth. Have received all messages pertaining to your war with Uranus on machine of my own construction. Exact parallel of your trouble occurred here in past ages. Can advise means of attack. Crude but can be revised to suit your conditions. Answer.

For five endless minutes the teletype remained in frozen silence. Then with a rush of type the reply came:

Our observations led us to believe all life ceased to exist on Earth a hundred or more years ago. If you have suggestion pertaining to our war, gratitude of people of Lirius would be great. We await your reply.

Rane drew a long breath and smiled grimly. To a scientist the wooden horse of Troy was anything but scientific, but to a scholar it had stood through the ages as a classical means of deception. His hands began to move over the keys as he typed out peculiar word combinations.

Rane was no dabbler in words, no writer, no scribe, but he did himself royally at that last and final message. He called to arm all the mythology he knew, and he described the wooden horse incident with great enthusiasm. Could not, he queried, a similar trick be attempted on Uranus? He clicked out his name with a flourish.

Three hours passed. The would-be scientist smoked cigarettes chain-fashion. He drank two cups of black coffee. The teletypes stood silent. Outside, rain of a dying storm lashed itself against the windows. Another hour passed and another, and then . . .

Vome, Lirius. General announcement to all peoples of Lirius. We are victorious. Dromeda is back, and the defeat of Uranus is an actuality. No indemnity will be demanded, but Lirian transports will hereafter have unrestricted rights in the spaceways. Defeat of Uranus came about in the following manner:

At 29:18, Lirius time, a message was received by the Unit A operator at Vome, purporting to come from Earth and suggesting a means of attack, which, though crude, struck a responsive chord with the commandant of the Lirian Expeditionary Force.

The suggestion involved the use of a wooden horse, hollow and large enough to secrete a number of Lirian soldiers. It was believed the word, 'horse', referred to higher form of animal life which was evolved on Earth during that planet's

Quaternary or Post Tertiary geologic period. The object was to be landed on Uranus, where, arousing curiosity, it would be taken within the walls. Under cover of Uranian night the concealed soldiers were to leave their hiding place and demolish the cosmic radiation towers, which heretofore had made attack impossible. This plan was immediately set into operation, a life-size image of a Voldadon, that herbivorous monster of the Lirian polar jungles being substituted for a 'horse'.

With such favorable results we can only express our full gratitude and appreciation to the Earth operator. The Interplanetary Diplomatic Council is now in session, outlining a plan of appreciation.

For the first time in many hours Rane permitted himself to sink back in his chair and relax slightly. What he had done, he told himself, was no more than any man in similar circumstances would have done. What was important was that a machine of his own making was successful beyond his most remote dreams, opening an unlimited path to the future.

He smoked a cigarette quietly, enjoying the atmosphere of rest and quiet that now flowed about him. Across on the far wall the hands of an electric clock moved slowly around the dial.

Suddenly the teletype began again. And as Rane read and decoded the message his heart leaped within him.

Vome, Lirius. To Joseph Rane, Granite Point, Earth. This is to notify you that a good-will expedition will leave from this planet to your world via one of our super-space transports. Dromeda, the most beautiful woman of Lirius, will be one of the passengers. Advise you to increase signal strength and broadcast power tone at intervals of five minutes, Earth-time, as guide beacon. Without this it is doubtful if we could find our way through uncharted space. Do not broadcast these facts as we wish to make our visit a complete surprise. Will inform you when to begin power tone on moment of departure.

Rane sat there stupefied, his eyes blank, his jaw slowly dropping open. Seconds passed, and there was no sound save the wind as it moaned around the outside corners of the house. Then with a leap he was out of his chair and across to the rheostat control. They needed more power, did they? Well he had an auxiliary dynamo at his disposal, and he would give it to them. His hand trembled as it grasped the knob, began slowly to turn it to the right.

The motor hum increased to a high-frequency drone that seemed to tremble the very foundations of the house. The hour-glass tube changed from cherry red to a gleaming crimson. Louder roared the dynamos, as the control panel vibrated to a whitish blur.

He returned to the teletype and waited. Presently messages began to come in in swift succession. There was an announcement to all peoples of Lirius that preparations for the interplanetary expedition were already on the verge of completion. There was a statement by the King of Lirius, bidding good fortune and success. And there was a long statement, signed by the ten members of the Lirian Diplomatic Council, expressing appreciation to the Earth operator in the warmest terms.

Rane frowned slightly. The inhabitants of the other world were overdoing it a bit, he thought. After all, he had only sent them a suggestion. Somehow there seemed a lack of sincerity in the various communications he had received.

But abruptly the teletype clicked off the following:

Vome, Lirius. Transport now leaving. Begin power tone.
We will contact you at intervals.

Unit A.

Rane tripped a switch, disconnecting the keyboard, and pressed a small contact button. A low, droning roar filled the room. Holding the power tone steadily, he took out his watch and laid it down before him. Intermittently at exact five-minute intervals his hand pushed down on the button. Between those intervals he switched the teletype back in, ready for any message that might be transmitted by the transport en route.

A message did come, rattling off the keys at terrific speed, but this time Rane stared at it with puzzled eyes.

3inqv mysyel mc8qux uu3nef qb ucaekch. gclmwuebd
rsnioc 3inqv mj xvop lkjhg. zxc utos qb dawquipmn.

This was odd. The key which he had applied to all previous messages and which in the last few hours he had learned practically by heart, failed absolutely to decipher the message. The grouped letters and numerals seemed to have been formed in another language-cipher entirely.

'Some military code, no doubt,' Rane mused aloud. 'They're giving orders regarding the defeated planet, Uranus.'

But his eyes darkened perceptibly, and when after three more five-minute intervals of sending the power tone, a second message likewise undecipherable came through, he turned the teletype over to transmission and went to work on the keyboard.

Unable to read your last two communications. What are you saying?

Rane.

No reply came to this interrogation. Puzzled, Rane took up paper and pencil, placed the strange messages before him and attempted to decode them. But he had no key word to work with this time, and he failed in each attempt.

Try though he would to disregard it, a lurking suspicion began to enter a far corner of his brain. Why should the Lirians suddenly begin to send messages in a cipher which they knew he could not understand? Obviously, because they did not want him to know what they were saying. But why?

Abruptly he stumbled upon a clue by accident. A single word, 3inqv, he noted, had been repeated several times, and contained a similar number of characters as the word *earth*. Hazarding a wild guess, he substituted 'earth' for this combination, following with the other letters and words in a trial and error method. He worked rapidly in between intervals of sending the power tone. Completed, the message bewildered him:

Earth power signal coming in clearly. Advancing toward Earth under full speed. All guns in readiness.

He read that last sentence three times while his lips tightened, and a queer glitter entered his eyes. The second communication in the new cipher was even stranger:

Reinforcements now leaving Lirius to aid you. 26 space dreadnoughts, three speed cruisers. Proceed with utmost caution. Attack immediately on arrival.

It was then that Rane jerked out of his chair, voicing a startled oath. He saw it all now, saw it clearly. And the cunning audacity, the treachery of it cut into him like a knife. This was no good-will expedition the Lirians were speeding through space. All statements to that effect had been a blind, tricking him into aiding them.

Drunk with power from their recent conquest of Uranus, the Lirians now planned to subjugate the earth. For years they had been aware of developments on earth, but through some error in calculations or observations they had come to believe that terrestrial life had ceased to exist. Made aware of their mistake, they now intended to utilize their advantage of the situation.

The cold-blooded deceit of it staggered Rane. One outstanding fact overwhelmed him with its significance: it was his actions alone that were responsible for this trouble. He alone could stop it. He must do so!

The watch showed that the five-minute time when the power tone was to be sent was overdue. Even as he raced across the room to shut off the dynamos, the keys of the teletype swung into action.

No power tone. Send immediately.

He stood there, galvanized to immobility. Would the simple discontinuance of his signal beacon be sufficient to halt the invaders before they reached their destination? He didn't know.

Demand power tone be sent at once. If not, dire consequences await you. Answer.

Still he made no move. Was this all some mad dream, some nightmare from which he would awake to laugh at his fears?

The stark reality of the room, the humming dynamos, the printed words on the rolled paper told him only too clearly it wasn't. In his mind's eye he saw huge battle-craft from outer galaxies, armed with strange weapons, landing to spread fearful havoc. He saw cities and towns annihilated by forces the inhabitants could neither see nor understand. He saw—

Rane, Granite Point, Earth. Give you two minutes to send power tone. Reception vital or we cannot proceed. If you do not reply at the end of that time we will blast you through our four-dimensional teleray. Remember we are in wave-length contact with you. You are no doubt aware by now that this is an expedition of war. In this respect we promise you complete safety to yourself. We are desirous only of complete conquest of Earth, which will then be placed under our government as a planetary possession. We did not lie when we stated that Dromeda, the most beautiful woman in Lirius, is aboard this transport as a passenger. If you obey all instructions and do as we order, we promise you her hand in marriage, also high position in Lirian court circle plus large share of loot. Give you two minutes to send power tone. If not heard at the end of that interval, we discharge teleray into your station. You cannot escape.

Rane stood there like a man in a daze. His fists clenched slowly; he could feel a pulse pounding at his temple. On the instrument table the watch ticked away the seconds.

One minute dragged by. Every detail of the room seemed to stand forth with stereoscopic clarity now. The two silent teletypes squatted there on the wooden bench, mocking instruments of destruction. The drone of the dynamos sang a threnody of death.

Twice Rane attempted to rush to the door and escape the house. Each time a peculiar bluish spark spat across the binding posts on the instrument panel, and he felt a magnetic attraction radiate from it to thwart his will. Realization came to him that this time the Lirians meant what they said. They were still in contact with him, and they were exerting an unknown power to prevent his escape. It was a physical impossibility for him to leave the room.

Thirty – fifteen seconds more. He stared at the watch, glanced at the control-button and smiled grimly. He slid slowly into the chair before the instrument desk. How simple it would be! A turn of a switch, a pressure on a rubber knob, and his own life would be saved. And yet—

Two minutes slipped by. His mind made up, Rane sat rigid. He made no move to send the power tone.

And then it happened! A terrific, grinding roar belched forth from the bowels of the machine. A huge cloud of greenish black smoke shot upward, and a span of white fire arced across the cables to envelop the scientist in a shroud of flame.

Like some monstrous gattling gun the thundrous crashes pounded through the room. The fire rose higher to lick hungrily at the ceiling. Then it died, to reveal a mass of twisted smoking metal with the body of Rane lifeless beside it.

On August 5th the *New York Times* carried the following small article at the bottom of its third page:

What was thought to be a new dark star of unknown origin was wrapped in mystery today after Professor Howard K. Althra, eminent astronomer of Mount Wilson Observatory, revealed his observations of the past two nights had ended in failure.

Two nights ago Professor Althra, aided by almost perfect atmospheric conditions, sighted a dark point moving out of the constellation Gemini, between Saturn and Neptune, and heading toward the earth at terrific speed. Professor Althra was able to chart the course of this body through space by its frequent and unexplainable variations of course, but he was unable to determine definitely whether it was a large body seen at a great distance or a small body close to earth.

‘At the time of the last observation,’ Professor Althra stated, ‘it almost seemed as if it faltered there in space, then turned about and headed back for the constellation Gemini. This, of course, is impossible, and I am unable to state definitely what the nature of the object was.’

A PAIR OF SWORDS

We had lingered and passed through the Egyptian Room, the Jade Room, and the chambers of the French and Italian Renaissance. Before that there had been many others, hundreds of others, it seemed, on either side of the long statue-lined halls with their floors of polished parquet. Curious how easily one forgets. Curious, rather, what the mind chooses to remember. A mummy or two, a necklace more delicate than the others, a wine cabinet which I childishly fancied and longed to have in my study, and a rare old candle chandelier, said to have illumined the table of the Spanish Philip II.

The drone of the guide's voice, low-pitched and endless, seemed to emerge from somewhere behind the Flemish hangings that covered the walls. It went on and on without the slightest inflection, and I caught myself wondering whether he talked the same when the day was over and he had left the gallery.

'One of the early works of Jean Baptiste Monnoyer, late Seventeenth Century. Formerly of the Fielding collection. Note the peculiar shadow-work in the background . . . That will be all in this room, ladies and gentlemen. Next we have the weapon gallery, said to be the most complete in all Europe. This way, please.'

I was the last of the group to pass through the intervening doorway, noting with some relief that we had reached the final point of tour. It was five o'clock, and I must hurry if I wished to make that appointment with Luella. An interesting chamber, this. It looked like the armor of a mediaeval castle. The art of killing a person has certainly developed. I munched another orange lozenge and moved across to where the guide was standing.

'This is the last executioner's sword used in France before the introduction of the guillotine. The blade is thirty-three inches long. All the blades on this wall are either Spanish or

Spanish-owned. The carved saber on the right was presented by the Duke of Savoy to Philip III in 1603. Observe the graceful hilt. The smaller one next to it is a Persian sword, Sixteenth Century, probably brought from Tunis by Charles V.'

Pistols next, from the earliest hand-cannon down, and the guide continued his litany like the hum of a lazy fly.

'A pair of holster pistols, Lazarino Cominazzo, mounts in chiseled steel. Probably the most perfect arms ever fashioned by the hand of man. An early Italian snaphance, a Kuchenreuter dueling-pistol with double leaf sight. Here we have an early Seventeenth Century arquebus, lock engraved with hunting scene . . .'

Someone had tapped me on the shoulder, and I turned abruptly. For a moment I stared, chewed hard on my lozenge, then restrained a smile. Two men stood just beyond the last of the curious gallery crowd, two men dressed in a most unusual manner.

Rich blue velvet doublets, white and black satin knee-breeches, flowing lace cuffs, swords at their sides, and large hats with flowing plumes. I smiled again. Silly idea, this masquerading the gallery guards as old French musketeers.

'Pardon, *M'sieu*, but would you be kind enough to step into the next room and help two gentlemen of France settle an affair of honor?'

'Would I—?' I surveyed them coldly as refusal rose to my lips. But the words died without being spoken. For some queer reason the room with its glinting array of yatagans, colichemardes and historic blades seemed to reach far out into the background and blend with the two curiously arrayed figures before me. As I stood there, the guide's voice continuing its monotonous drone, the atmosphere slightly touched with dust pressing close at my nostrils, my first start of surprise gradually passed away, and I received the man's question as if it had not been unusual at all.

No other word was spoken. The two men, taking my silence for consent, led the way through a little doorway on the right and into a larger chamber, unfurnished save for an enormous painting of Cardinal Richelieu on the farther side.

The light from the two arched windows was better here, and I studied with interest the features of the two outlandishly

dressed strangers. One, slightly the taller, was fair as a young girl, with a blond waxed mustache and blue pleasant eyes. The other, older and more at ease, was dark, smooth-shaven and thin-lipped. Both strode forward with a haughty fearless air.

'Sir,' said the blond man to me, 'you must be second for both of us. Should my opponent be fortunate enough to dispatch me, you will please give proper notice of my death. I am—'

'Zounds!' cried the other. 'What matter who you are? Once you are dead, you are dead, and that is the end. For rest assured I am going to teach you a lesson, and when I do there will be none to despoil my claim to the hand of Lady Constance. Sir, on guard!'

There was a ring of steel, and two swords glistened in the slanting sunlight. I stepped back and stared at the two as they parried, thrust, and sought to pierce each other's guard. Back and forth, in and out, they moved, blades gyrating with the skill of masters.

'You fight well, sir,' muttered the darker man through his teeth. 'Twill be a shame to take such a blade from the king.'

'Love inspires strength,' breathed the other. 'I fight for the most beautiful woman in the world, one whom your hands shall never touch.'

The dark man curled his lip in a sneer. 'Fool!' he said. 'She loves me, not you. Did she not hang this locket round my neck to keep with me always, a token of her love? You are but a boy and her plaything. Behind your back she laughs at you. Look at this locket, I say. See the seal of her house upon it? You are a twice-born fool!'

Slowly the face of the blond youth paled. 'She gave you that?' he cried.

'Even now she laughs at the thought of you,' taunted the dark man. 'Put up your sword, fellow, and I will let you live and forget.'

The blue eyes were glinting like agate now, the blond hair trembling in the double shaft of sunlight.

'Then you shall wear it to your death, *M'sieu*,' he said. 'Do you hear? That seal shall lock your lips for ever.'

It happened then in the wink of an eyelash. The blond youth fainted, dropped back, and shot his rapier straight for the throat of his opponent where the golden disk hung suspended from a

silken chain. Too late the dark man strove to parry. The blade struck the locket, pierced its center and passed through the man's throat. With a gurgling cry he sank upon one knee and fell to the floor.

Perhaps I closed my eyes for an instant after that as a wave of vertigo rushed through my head. Perhaps a cloud momentarily shut off the golden sunlight that streamed through the windows. But when once again I looked out before me, the scene had changed. I was standing back in the weapon gallery with the queer arms on all sides. The last of the curious crowd was passing through the exit, and the guide was following them a few steps behind.

'One moment,' I said as he was about to step across the sill. 'One moment, please. What are these two swords mounted here on this wall? Is there a history attached to them?'

The guide frowned. 'Weren't you listening, sir?' he asked. 'I explained that only a moment before. Those blades are the least interesting in the entire room. They are here only because they represent a type. Musketeers' swords. Once owned by guardsmen of Louis XIII. Why do you ask?'

Before the man could stop me, I had reached up and lifted the right-hand sword from the wall.

The guide suddenly hissed an exclamation over my shoulder, then snatched away the blade and scrutinized it closely. When he spoke there was a tone of anger in his voice.

'Damme, if someone hasn't had the nerve to take a locket from Tray Six in the Jewelry Room and stick it here on the blade!' he bemoaned. 'Say, won't the superintendent be furious! Utterly ruined the thing, and for no reason at all. That locket was valuable too. Belonged to an old French noble family once. Look, sir, you can see the coat of arms just where the blade passed through.'

A STUDY IN DARKNESS

It lacked twenty minutes of midnight when I locked the door of my apartment and raced down the steps to the waiting cab. A heavy rain, driven by a howling wind, swirled across the pavement.

'Sixteen Monroe Street,' I snapped to the driver. 'Oak Square. And drive like hell!'

The cab jerked forward, roared north into Monte Curve and turned east toward Carter. I leaned back then and prayed for a clear way through the night traffic. But even with the best of luck I knew I was treading on counted time.

Only a scant few minutes before, I had been in bed asleep. Then had come that urgent telephone call with that familiar voice over the wire.

'Dr Haxton? Dr James Haxton? This is your old friend, Stephen Fay. Can you come immediately? Something terrible has happened, and I'm in need of medical help. Hurry, man!'

The voice had ended in a gasp and a moan, and the connection had been severed with a crash.

Fay – Stephen Fay. I had known the man for a matter of ten years. We had worked side by side, in fact, as struggling students with adjoining laboratories. A huge man with a frank, open face, an engaging smile and an uncontrollable desire to probe deeper into the mysteries of science.

Down Carter we sped, windshield gray with drooling rain, across St Clair, and into Monroe. Stephen Fay's residence was a forlorn pile of red brick, three stories in height, with a narrow, uninviting doorway.

A girl answered my ring, and as I hesitated, staring at her, she grasped my arm and drew me quickly inside.

'Thank God, you've come, Doctor,' she said. 'My uncle – Mr Fay – in the library. He's bleeding badly.'

Even in the excitement of the moment I found myself noting

the exquisite beauty of the white-faced girl as we paced silently down the corridor. Then she thrust a connecting door open, and I found myself face to face with my old friend.

He lay stretched full length on a divan, face contorted in agony. His coat and shirt had been ripped to shreds, as if by the repeated slashes of a razor-edged knife, and the exposed flesh was striped and cross-striped with deep gashes and incisions. A bath towel, red with blood, had been pressed against his throat. Removing it, I saw that he was bleeding profusely from a wound a scant inch from the jugular.

Fay rose up as I slid out of my coat.

'Leave the room, Jane,' he gasped. 'Dr Haxton will take care of me.'

It was a hospital job, one that required four stitches and possibly a local anesthetic, but I knew Fay's wonderful strength and his hatred for any undue commotion. So without further word I set to work.

Half an hour later he was resting easily, weak from loss of blood, but still amazingly calm and composed.

'Haxton,' he said as I tried to keep him from talking, 'Haxton, I want you to stay here tonight. Can you arrange it? I — I need someone to help me protect that girl. It — it may come again.'

I started to give him a bromide, thought better of it, and closed my case with a snap.

'What may come again?' I asked. 'In heaven's name, what's wrong here?'

Fay swallowed painfully. 'I'll tell you,' he said. 'I'll tell you what was wrong. It's a rat!'

I saw that he was in deadly earnest and that he was awaiting my reaction with almost feverish anxiety. His hands opened and closed convulsively, and his eyes regarded me with set pupils.

'A *what*?' I stammered.

He rose from the divan and lurched across to the great flat-topped desk that stood in the center of the room. He seized something like a paper weight from its surface and handed it to me.

'Look at it. I don't think you've ever seen anything quite like it before.'

The thing was made of wood, mounted on a flat base, and from top to bottom measured no more than six inches. A small carving it was, with agate eyes, protruding teeth, and a long, curved tail, crudely fashioned to resemble a life-size rat.

Placed on the desk where it belonged, it would hardly have attracted a second glance, but leering up at me as it was now from my cupped hands, it was a thing of inanimate horror. There was something repulsive in that squat gray form, something utterly loathsome in the way it crouched there on its black mounting, poised as though ready to leap at my throat.

I shuddered slightly. 'Not very pretty.'

Fay sat down in a chair and closed his eyes.

'I found that in an Arab shop,' he began, 'in the native quarter of Macassar, in the Celebes. Bought it for a few pennies simply because it caught my eye. I didn't find out what it was until I came back to the States and showed it to my friend, Henderson, of the Chicago School of Anthropology. That carving is not a fetish or an ornament, but an image, a native object of worship.'

I said nothing. There was a story coming, but I had associated with Fay long enough to know that he would start at the beginning, reserving any climax there might be for the last.

'North of New Guinea, almost on the equator, in longitude one hundred and forty-two degrees,' he continued, 'there is an island known as Wuvulu, a tiny pinpoint of land near the Moluccas. Henderson tells me the aborigines of this island have one of the lowest forms of religion in the Indies. They worship the rat! This image is one of the few that has found its way into the outside world.'

'When Jane, my niece, came to live with me, she refused to let the ugly thing repose on my desk openly and insisted that I cover it. I dropped an old piece of black cloth over it, and it has remained there in that manner until tonight – until five minutes before I telephoned you. Then' – Fay braced himself and leaned far forward – 'then it came alive!'

The man sat there, scrutinizing me intently, watching my every facial move. He must have seen the incredulity in my eyes, for he rose slowly like a figure on clockwork.

'You don't believe, Haxton? You think I'm joking? Come, and I'll show you the proof!'

He moved to the door, still weak from loss of blood, and I followed a few steps behind. At the threshold two people entered the room to meet us – the girl who had admitted me to this house, and a tall, thin man clad in a rubberized raincoat.

Fay waved his hand in introduction.

‘My niece, Jane Barron, Haxton. I’ve already explained to her that my accident was caused by the breaking of a glass acid vat in the laboratory.’

He nodded significantly, and I understood at once that he desired to keep the truth from the girl for the present.

‘And this,’ he went on, ‘is Corelli, my laboratory assistant and helper.’

The Italian bowed low. Apparently he had been out and had returned to the house only a few moments before the accident, whatever it was, had occurred.

‘Are you all right, Uncle?’ the girl cried. ‘You look so weak and pale.’ Then to me: ‘You must tell him to be more careful with his experiments, Doctor.’

Fay patted her gently. ‘I’ll be all right, child, but it’s so late I’ve asked Dr Haxton to stay the rest of the night. Will you arrange the guest room?’

Corelli looked at his employer with concern. ‘I trust the wounds are not too painful, Signor,’ he said. ‘If you wish, I will—’

Fay nodded absently. ‘Go to bed, Corelli, Dr Haxton and I are going to stay up awhile. I’m going to show him my color-music machine.’

The Italian bowed once more and left the room. Jane disappeared up a staircase that led to the floor above, and a moment later I found myself pacing down an ill-lighted corridor by the side of the wounded man.

We came at length to a large high-ceilinged room, lined with racks of apparatus.

‘My laboratory,’ Fay said.

My attention was attracted to a ponderous machine in the center, which at the moment seemed only a confusing mass of wheels, tubes, reflectors and dials.

Fay led the way past this instrument, and stopped abruptly, pointing to a spot near the floor. There was a large ragged hole there, reaching from the bottom of the baseboard to a point

some distance up the wall. From the hole, leading across the parquet floor, were a series of sharp scratches, marks that had penetrated the varnish.

To the left a small zinc-covered table was overturned on its side, with a mass of apparatus thrown in wild confusion. Still wet and dripping over the latter was a large clot of blood and a tuft of what I saw on closer inspection to be short gray fur.

I rose to my feet slowly. Fay moved across the room to one of several chairs.

'I told you that rat image came to life tonight. You thought I was crazy when I said it. Believe me, Haxton, I never was more sane in my life.

'I've been working hard the last month or so, perfecting an experiment with what is known as color-music. Tonight Jane insisted I take the evening off and go with her to a movie. Accordingly I told Corelli, my assistant, to get everything ready for a final test in the morning before he left for the evening. We returned early. Jane went to her room, and I went immediately to the laboratory.

'All the way I was conscious of some kind of danger ahead. Then I pushed open the laboratory door and stepped inside. It happened before I could move. By the light of the night lamp in the corridor I had a glimpse of a gray shape and a head with red eyes and white gleaming teeth. The thing was utterly huge, large as a dog, and it threw itself straight at my throat, clawing like mad.

'I screamed, I believe. Then I managed to twist free, reach out and switch on the light.

'With the room lit, I saw it. It stood there a moment, eyes blinking in the sudden glare. Then as if the light were its only fear, it turned, raced across the floor, upset that table and made for that hole which it had gnawed in the wall. But before it reached it, I had sufficiently collected my wits to seize a heavy knife from the stand by the door, hurl it and catch the thing a full blow on the back. It let out a terrible shriek, then disappeared through the wall.'

Fay paused, gripped the chair arm tightly.

'And unquestionably that rat was a gigantic incarnation of the image on my desk in the library!'

I sat there stupidly. 'It all sounds impossible,' I said. 'Mad -

insane in every detail. But why do you say that the rat was an incarnation of that wooden image?’

Fay leaned back. ‘Because,’ he said huskily, ‘the thing was no real rat, no natural creature of a living order. I know that. It was a hideous caricature, a deformed monstrosity with the same exaggerated lines and detail of that wooden god. The head was rectangular rather than round. The eyes were far out of proportion, and the teeth – were long white fangs. God, it was horrible!’

For a long time after that, while a clock high up on the wall ticked off the passing seconds, we sat in silence. At length I voiced my thoughts.

‘Whatever the thing is, supernatural or otherwise, it’s real enough to cause flesh-and-blood wounds and to be wounded itself. We can’t stand by and let it come and go as it wills. Where does that hole in the wall lead?’

Fay shook his head. ‘This is an old house,’ he said, ‘and there are unusually large spaces between the walls. I found that out when I tapped them for several of my experiments. That rat has the run of the entire structure. It must have been only chance that led it to choose the laboratory for a point to gnaw its way to freedom.’

We used two heavy boards and a piece of sheet-iron to cover the opening. Along the baseboard on each of the four walls we ran an uncovered piece of copper wire, electrically charged with a high voltage from Fay’s laboratory current. It meant that a second attempt on the part of the horror to enter the room would result in its instant electrocution. It meant that – if the thing were not invulnerable to such a mundane defence.

‘No one knows about what happened tonight save me?’ I asked then.

Fay shook his head. ‘No one. I didn’t choose to frighten my niece, and Corelli was out at the time.’

‘Corelli has been with you long?’

‘About a year. He’s an odd sort of person but harmless, I think. Never says much except when he talks about his color theory. Then he babbles incessantly. The man has a mad way of mixing spiritualism with science. Believes that white is the essence of all that is good and black is the lair of evil, or some such rot. He even showed me a thesis on this which he had

written. Aside from that, however, he's really a capable laboratory assistant . . .'

A strange bed to me, whatever the surroundings, is always the same. Tonight, with my mind milling over the story that had been related to me, I found sleep almost impossible. Hours passed before I dozed off.

But at three o'clock by the radium clock on the dresser, I found myself sitting upright in bed. Something, some foreign noise had wakened me.

I got up, crossed to the door and looked out into the corridor. Blackness met my eyes. Then a sound reached me from the far end of the hall, and I stole stealthily forward. The sound came louder. It was the *swish-swish* of liquid being brushed on a hard surface, the sound of a man painting.

I pressed my body close to the wall, muffling the noise of my breathing through the cloth of my pajama tops. Footsteps then, receding footsteps. Carefully keeping my distance I moved on, and at the turn of the hall stopped abruptly.

The door of the bedchamber there – Jane's bedchamber – stood out in the blackness like a panel of silver fire. It had been painted with some kind of luminous paint. The brush marks were still wet and sticky.

I twisted the latch and peered into the room. The faint glow from the window revealed the girl sleeping peacefully in the bed.

Nodding with relief, I moved on again down the corridor. At the staircase I heard the library door on the floor below click shut. I descended slowly and waited at the foot of the stairs for an eternity, listening.

At length I pushed boldly into the library. Corelli was sitting at the desk, a trail of smoke rising from his cigarette, an open book before him. He looked up as if in surprise.

'Couldn't sleep,' I said shortly. 'Thought I'd come down here and read a spell. You seem to have had the same idea.'

He stared at me, then broke into a short laugh.

'I do more than read, Signor. I study. I am busy days, so I have only nights to work on my theory.'

'Ah, yes,' I replied. 'Mr Fay spoke to me about it. Something about color, isn't it, and the qualities of black and white?'

A gleam of interest sprang into his eyes.

'The Signor is interested in color, yes?'

'Some. Stephen Fay is my friend, and I have worked with him on many of his experiments.'

The Italian nodded and pointed a finger toward his book.

'I am reading LaFlarge,' he said. 'A brilliant mind, but a fool. They are all fools, these scientists. They see only the physical facts. They see only things which exist materially before their eyes. They claim there is nothing psychic.'

I crossed to a chair and sat down.

'Tell me,' I said, 'what has the psychic to do with color?'

'Everything, Signor. Fay – all scientists – will tell you that color is a phenomenon that occurs when daylight passes through a quartz prism. The rays from the sun are decomposed and form what the eyes see as the spectrum band, red at one end, violet at the other. That is elementary, of course.'

'A body, a piece of blue cloth, for example, illuminated by daylight, appears colored because it absorbs red and yellow and throws back blue. In other words color in an object is produced by absorption. Is that clear?'

'I know all that,' I said.

'Black, which of course is the absence of all color, is seen as black because it is the absorption of all and the reflection of none. One might liken it to a lake of pitch in the midst of the jungle. It takes everything into itself and allows nothing to escape. It is iniquity, the essence of all evil.'

'Has it never occurred to you that even the ancients recognized this fact? We have Satan as the prince of blackness; the worshipping ceremonial to him is the black mass; we have black art and black magic. Throughout the ages black has always been synonymous for everything that is evil.'

'I see,' I said slowly.

'My theory then,' Corelli went on, 'lies in the exploration of black, not only physically but psychically. Let us say we have a room entirely painted black. Those walls are then the absorption of all wave lengths of light. Any photographer will tell you that an object – a book, a chair, a table – is seen only as a result of that object refracting wave lengths of light into the retina of the human eye.'

'Is it not reasonable to suppose, therefore, that in this room

of which I speak, any object or the refracted psychic equivalent of it will find itself likewise absorbed into the black walls?

'You begin to perceive, Signor? Where there is blackness, there is always fear. A child cries out when it enters a dark room. We reason with the child, tell it there is nothing there. Might we not be wrong? Might not the child's clean mind sense something which we in our more complex lives do not see nor understand?'

Corelli leaned back in his chair and lit another cigarette.

'Granting all that,' I said slowly, 'why would it necessarily follow that in black we would find only evil. Since black, as you say, is the absorption of everything, it must absorb the good as well, and the former has always been acknowledged to be the stronger of the two.'

The Italian's eyes did not change.

'Think a moment, Signor,' he said, 'and you will see that only evil can live where there is utter blackness. Anything else would be smothered like a flower away from its precious sunlight. I—'

His voice clipped off, and I stiffened in my chair. From the floor above had come a girl's scream. Hollow and muffled by the intervening walls, the cry filtered through the house, filled with fear and stark terror.

With a single leap I was across the room and racing up the stairs. In the corridor above I switched on the lights as Stephen Fay emerged from his room and, white-faced, began to run toward me.

I reached the freshly-painted door of Jane's room, ripped it open and burst inside. The girl was huddled on the bed, eyes wide with terror.

'Miss Barron, are you hurt?'

She gave a low moan and buried her head in her hands, sobbing.

'It was horrible!' she gasped. 'A monster! A rat! A rat twenty times the ordinary size! It came out of that hole in the wall next to my dressing table and — and leaped onto the bed. Then it crouched, staring at me. Then—'

The girl sobbed hysterically . . .

It was a grim group that stood in the gray light of the

library next morning. Jane Barron was still white and trembling, though I had administered a slight sedative a few minutes before. Corelli smoked nervously, throwing away cigarettes and lighting fresh ones before they were half consumed.

'I'm warning each of you,' Fay said, 'to move about the house with the greatest of caution. Something is loose in these walls, something we can't understand. Besides that, during the night the door of Jane's room was for some unexplainable reason coated with a paint containing calcium sulphide, making it appear luminous in the dark. Also someone entered my laboratory and tampered with my color-music machine.'

'Haxton' - Fay nodded toward me - 'I'm placing my niece's protection in your hands. Later perhaps it may be necessary to call the police.'

After that I was alone in the library.

For some reason I had chosen not to reveal to Fay that it was the Italian who had smeared paint on the girl's door. Until further developments I meant to keep that fact to myself.

I picked up the thing then, which Fay claimed was at the bottom of the whole affair; the wooden carving of the rat. Again as I stared down upon its ugly body and curiously deformed head, an inner sense of horror welled over me.

Yet I told myself that was absurd. The image was only a manufactured god, representing a fanatic religion.

But an instant later I sat quite still as an insane idea began to clamor for recognition far back in a corner of my brain! An insane idea, yes, and yet one which fitted the conditions and which offered a method of combat! I leaped to my feet and headed for the laboratory.

Fay was there, as I had expected, and his composed manner quieted me for a moment.

'I can't understand it,' he was saying. 'The instrument was quite all right yesterday evening when I left for the movie. Corelli claims not to have touched it, and anyway he would have no reason at all for doing so. Yet the entire slide containing the color plates has been removed and this wooden frame inserted in its place.'

I stared at the device. 'It looks like a projection machine,' I said.

Fay nodded. 'It is. The instrument is constructed to throw

upon a screen a rapidly changing circle of colors. It will be synchronized with an organ in such a way that when a piece of music is played, each note of sound will be accompanied by a corresponding color on the screen. There are seven notes, and there are seven primary colors. Thus in a rendition of a sonata we will both see and hear the composition. I—'

He broke off as the door burst open and Corelli lurched into the room.

'The rat, Signors!' he whispered. 'It has come again! I saw it in the corridor.'

But the corridor was empty. We traversed its length from one end to the other. Then we continued our search through the entire house. Deep into the many shadows of that ancient structure we probed. The rooms were silent and empty. Those on the third floor were closed off and barren of furniture. We found nothing.

At the foot of the stairs I suddenly whirled upon Fay.

'This new machine of yours,' I said. 'It uses artificial light to produce its colors?'

'Of course,' he replied. 'A carbon arc at present. Later an incandescent of some kind.'

'And with the color plates removed as they are, the only thing that would appear on the screen would be a circle of white light. Is that right?'

'Not exactly,' Fay explained. 'Artificial light differs from daylight in that there is a deficiency of blue. Strictly speaking, the instrument would throw a shaft of yellow light.'

'But could it be made pure white light?' I persisted.

He thought a moment. 'Yes,' he said, 'it could. I have a Sheringham improved daylight lamp. Its light is the nearest man-made parallel to the rays of the sun. What are you driving at?'

'Fay,' I said, 'if you value your life, if you value the life of your niece, listen to me! Insert that lamp in your machine and arrange the projector so that it can be moved in a complete arc. Do you understand? In a complete arc!'

At half-past ten that night I stood once again before the frowning door of 16 Monroe Street. The intervening hours I had spent in a hurried trip to my own rooms and a brief but necessary visit to my patients in St Mary's hospital.

Nothing had happened during my absence. Fay led me to the library, poured two glasses of brandy and then nervously packed his pipe.

'The machine is ready,' he said. 'What you've got in mind, I don't know, but the daylight lamp has been substituted for the carbon arc, and the projector is mounted on a swivel. What now?'

I set down my glass. 'Let's have a look,' I said.

In the laboratory a moment later Fay adjusted several controls and pointed the instrument toward a screen. Then, motioning me to extinguish the lights, he switched on the current.

A dazzling shaft of light leaped from the narrow tube and spread a glaring circle of effulgence on the screen. Fay moved the projector, and the light traveled slowly, stabbing each article in the room in sharp relief.

'You have casters you could mount on the instrument, making it moveable?' I asked.

Fay thought a moment. 'Y-es,' he slowly replied.

'Use them then and add an extension of at least twenty-five feet to the current wire.'

He glared at me, but I swung about and left the room before he could voice protestations.

From eleven o'clock until eleven-thirty I prowled aimlessly about the house, glancing from time to time to time at the wall baseboards, nervously sucking a cold cigar. Finally in the library I picked up the desk phone and called Police Headquarters.

'McFee?' I said. 'Dr Haxton speaking. Yes, that's right - of St Mary's. McFee, I'm at Mr Stephen Fay's residence, Sixteen Monroe Street, just across from Oak Square. Can you send a man out there right away? No, no trouble yet, but I'm afraid there might be . . . Yes, in a hurry. I'll explain later.'

I forked the phone and waited. A quarter of an hour passed, and then, answering the ring at the street door, I found a lanky, hawk-faced policeman.

'Listen,' I said before he could ask any questions, 'I'm the physician in charge here. Your job is simply to look on, remember anything you see and prepare to sign a written report as a witness.'

At ten minutes past twelve the five of us - Fay, Jane, Corelli,

the patrolman and I entered the laboratory. We took positions according to my directions, the girl between Fay and me, the Italian in a chair slightly to the side.

Five feet in front of the door a connecting drop-cord was let down from the ceiling with a red-frosted electric light. Fay had wheeled the heavy color machine forward, facing the door.

'Ready, Fay?' I said, trying hard to keep my voice steady.

He nodded, and I stepped to the door, closed it halfway and extinguished the lights. We were in deep gloom now with the dim glow of the red light gleaming like an evil eye before us. And silence broken only by the hollow rumble of a far-away street car.

Suddenly Corelli leaped to his feet.

'Signors,' he cried, 'I refuse to sit here like a cat in the dark!'

'You'll stay where you are!' Fay snapped.

And so we waited. I could hear the ticking of my wristwatch. The Italian's breathing grew louder and more hurried, and I could feel Jane's hands open and close convulsively around the chair arm.

A quarter of an hour snailed by. I wiped a bead of perspiration from my forehead. Ten minutes more. And then we heard it!

From the outer corridor came the padding of approaching feet. Toward the laboratory door they came. I placed a warning hand on Fay's arm.

The door opened wide. A scream of horror mounted unsounded to my lips. What I saw I will never forget. A shapeless gray body with a rectangular head crouched there, eyes gleaming hellishly.

For a split second the five of us remained motionless with horror. Then riving the silence came Jane's shriek followed by a deafening roar from the policeman's revolver. The rat braced itself and leaped into the room.

'The light!' I cried. 'Fay, the white light, do you hear?'

There was a snap and a hum, and a shaft of glaring blue-white radiance shot from the mouth of the projector. But even as it formed a circle on the far wall, the horror singled out one of our number for its attack. Corelli!

The Italian went down with a scream as the rat threw itself upon him.

I heard the dull crunch and the snap of breaking bone.

Then that beam of light swept across the room under Fay's guiding hand and centered full on the thing; livid under the ghastly ray, its head twisted around, eyes twin globules of hate. With a mewling cry of rage it made for the door.

'After it!' I shouted.

Together Fay and I rolled the projector into the outer corridor. It was blind, that corridor. It ended in a blank wall, and the doors on either side beyond the laboratory were closed.

Straight down the hall we pushed the color machine. The rat was uttering queer rasping sounds now, shambling wildly from side to side as it sought to escape the hated light.

Trapped, the thing stopped, whirled, then plunged straight at Fay. Even as the scientist's cry rose up I rushed forward to aid him. A raking claw gashed its way to the bone in my left shoulder. A nauseating animal stench choked my nostrils.

Then I seized the machine's projector tube and swung it. The white glare swept upon the rat squarely, centered on the head. An instant the horror poised motionless. Then slowly it began to disintegrate. The features ran together like heated clay. The eyes and mouth fell away. Before me a lump of gray fur diminished to a thin slime, to a darkish mist that rose slowly upward. Then that, too, wavered under my gaze and disappeared . . .

I came back to consciousness on the divan in the library with Jane Barron chafing my wrists and Stephen Fay looking on nervously.

'It's all over, Haxton,' he was saying. 'Corelli's dead. The rat killed him. But — but I don't understand—'

I struggled to my feet, dazedly.

'Come to the laboratory, Fay,' I said, 'and I'll show you.'

We made our silent way to that room of apparatus where the Italian's body still lay motionless on the floor. Bending over it I searched the pockets and at length drew forth two objects. A small leather-covered notebook and a piece of black cloth, about the size of a napkin.

'Recognize it?' I asked, holding up the cloth.

Fay nodded. 'Yes. It's the covering Jane gave me for the rat image on the library desk. But—'

I opened the notebook, glanced at it, then handed it to Fay.

For a long time he remained silent as he scanned the pages.

When he looked up at length a strange light was in his eyes.

'You see,' I said, 'Corelli was in love with your niece. Didn't he at some time ask if he could marry her?'

'Yes,' Fay replied. 'But that was absurd, of course. I told him he was crazy and let it go at that.'

'Exactly,' I nodded. 'And in doing so you injured his Latin pride. He became mad with secret rage, and he swore revenge against you. You know the man's color theory – that black being the absorption of everything is the lair of all evil. He saw that rat image on the library desk, and he recognized it as an artifact of devil-worship, the essence of everything satanic.'

'Over the image you had draped a black cloth. According to Corelli's theory then, that cloth was the psychic equivalent of all that the image in its carved form represented. Do you understand?'

'He stole the cloth, mounted it on a wooden frame and inserted it in your color-music machine. Then he reversed the mechanism, and by casting a beam of black light upon the screen caused that horrible monster to be freed from its black cloth imprisonment and endowed with physical life.'

'If we accept that reasoning, then Corelli's intention was to find a way of destroying you and at the same time prove the truth of his theory. That is why he smeared the luminous paint on Jane's bedroom door. White, being the antithesis of black, was a counter-defense, and he had no desire to see your niece harmed.'

'For the same reason I asked you to insert the daylight lamp in the color machine. It was the only way of fighting the thing.'

Fay had listened to me in silence. A queer, bewildered look crossed his face.

'But – but you can't expect me to believe all that,' he objected. 'It isn't scientific. It's mad from beginning to end! The whole thing has no foundation in fact. Black – white – Good Lord, man, no scientist in the world would believe—'

'Perhaps not,' I agreed. 'Perhaps I'm wrong. If I am, we'll never know. Corelli is dead. But one thing I do know. I'm going to take this cloth and notebook and that image in the library, throw them into the fire and burn them.'

And I did.

MIVE

Carling's Marsh, some called it, but more often it was known by the name of Mive. Strange name that – Mive. And it was a strange place. Five wild, desolate miles of thick water, green masses of some kind of kelp, and violent vegetable growth. To the east the cypress trees swelled more into prominence, and this district was vaguely designated by the villagers as Flan. Again a strange name, and again I offer no explanation. A sense of depression, of isolation perhaps, which threatened to crush any buoyancy of feeling possessed by the most hardened traveler, seemed to emanate from this lonely wasteland. Was it any wonder that its observers always told of seeing it at night, before a storm, or in the spent afternoon of a dark and frowning day? And even if they had wandered upon it, say on a bright morning in June, the impression probably would have been the same, for the sun glittering upon the surface of the olive water would have lost its brilliance and become absorbed in the roily depths below. However, the presence of this huge marsh would have interested no one, had not the east road skirted for a dismal quarter-mile its melancholy shore.

The east road, avoided, being frequently impassable because of high water, was a roundabout connection between the little towns of Twellen and Lamarr. The road seemed to have been irresistibly drawn toward the Mive, for it cut a huge half-moon across the country for seemingly no reason at all. But this arc led through a wilderness of an entirely different aspect from the land surrounding the other trails. Like the rest it started among the hills, climbed the hills, and rambled down the hills, but after passing Echo Lake, that lowering tarn locked in a deep ravine, it straggled up a last hillock and swept down upon a large flat. And as one proceeded, the flat steadily sank lower, it forgot the hills, and the ground, already damp, became sodden and quivering under the feet.

And then looming up almost suddenly – Mive! . . . a morass at first a bog, then a jungle of growth repulsive in its over-luxuriance, and finally a sea of kelp, an inland Sargasso.

Just why I had chosen the east road for a long walk into the country I don't really know. In fact, my reason for taking such a hike at all was rather vague. The day was certainly anything but ideal; a raw wind whipping in from the south, and a leaden sky typical of early September lent anything but an inviting aspect to those rolling Rentharpian hills. But walk I did, starting out briskly as the inexperienced all do, and gradually slowing down until four o'clock found me plodding almost mechanically along the flat. I dare say every passer-by, no matter how many times he frequented the road, always stopped at exactly the same spot I did and suffered the same feeling of awe and depression that came upon me as my eyes fell upon that wild marsh. But instead of hurrying on, instead of quickening my steps in search of the hills again, I for some unaccountable reason left the trail and plunged through oozing fungi to the water's very edge.

A wave of warm humid air, heavy with the odor of growth, swept over me as though I had suddenly opened the door of some monstrous hothouse. Great masses of vines with fat creeping tendrils hung from the cypress trees. Razor-edged reeds, marsh grass, long waving cattails, swamp vegetation of a thousand kinds flourished here with luxuriant abundance. I went on along the shore; the water lapped steadily the sodden earth at my feet, oily-looking water, grim-looking, reflecting a sullen and overcast sky.

There was something fascinating in it all, and while I am not one of those adventurous souls who revel in the unusual, I had no thought of turning back to the road, but plodded through the soggy, clinging soil, and over rotting logs as though hurrying toward some destination. The very contrast, the voluptuousness of all the growth seemed some mighty lure, and I came to a halt only when gasping for breath from exertion.

For perhaps half an hour I stumbled forward at intervals, and then from the increasing number of cypress trees I saw that I was approaching that district known as the Flan. A large lagoon lay there, stagnant, dark, and entangled among the rip-grass and reeds, reeds that rasped against each other in a dry,

unpleasant manner like some sleeper constantly clearing his throat.

All the while I had been wondering over the absolute absence of all animate life. With its dank air, its dark appeal, and its wildness, the Eden recesses of the Mive presented a glorious place for all forms of swamp life. And yet not a snake, not a toad, nor an insect had I seen. It was strange, and I looked curiously about me as I walked.

And then . . . and then as if in contradiction to my thoughts it fluttered before me.

With a gasp of amazement I found myself staring at an enormous ebony-black butterfly. Its jet coloring was magnificent, its proportions startling, for from wing tip to wing tip it measured fully fifteen inches. It approached me slowly, and as it did I saw that I was wrong in my classification. It was not a butterfly; neither was it a moth; nor did it seem to belong to the order of the *Lepidoptera* at all. As large as a bird, its great body came into prominence over the wings, disclosing a huge proboscis, ugly and repulsive.

I suppose it was instinctively that I stretched out my hand to catch the thing as it suddenly drew nearer. My fingers closed over it, but with a frightened whirl it tore away, darted high in the air, and fluttered proudly into the undergrowth.

It was then that I became aware that the first two fingers and a part of my palm were lightly coated with a powdery substance that had rubbed off the delicate membrane of the insect's wings. The perspiration of my hand was fast changing this powder into a sticky bluish substance, and I noticed that this gave off a delightfully sweet odor. The odor grew heavier. It seemed to fill the air, to crowd my lungs, to create an irresistible desire to taste it. I sat down on a log; I tried to fight it off, but like a blanket it enveloped me and the desire became irresistible.

At length I could stand it no longer, and I slowly brought my fingers to my lips. A horribly bitter taste which momentarily paralyzed my entire mouth and throat was the result. It ended in a long coughing spell.

Disgusted at my lack of will-power, I turned and began to retrace my steps toward the road. A feeling of nausea and of sluggishness began to steal over me, and I quickened my pace.

But at the same time I kept watch for a reappearance of that strange butterfly. No sound now save the washing of the heavy water against the reeds and the sucking noise of my steps.

I had gone farther than I realized, and I cursed the foolish whim that had sent me here. As for the butterfly – whom could I make believe the truth of its size or even of its existence? I had nothing for proof, and . . . I stopped suddenly!

A peculiar formation of vines had attracted my attention – and yet not vines either. The thing was oval, about five feet in length, and appeared to be many weavings or coils of some kind of hemp. It lay fastened securely in a lower crotch of a cypress. One end was open, and the whole thing was a grayish color like a cocoon: A shudder of horror swept over me.

With a cocoon as large as this, the size of the butterfly would be enormous. In a flash I saw the reason for the absence of all other life in the Mive. These butterflies, developed as they were to such proportions, must have evolved into some strange order and became carnivorous. The fifteen-inch butterfly which had so startled me before faded into insignificance in the presence of this cocoon.

I seized a huge stick for defense and hurried on toward the road. A low muttering of thunder from somewhere off to the west added to my discomfort. Black threatening clouds, harbingers of an oncoming storm, were racing in from the horizon. The gloom blurred into a darkness, and I picked my way forward along the shore with more and more difficulty. Suddenly the mutterings stopped, and there came that expectant, sultry silence that precedes the breaking of a storm.

But no storm came. The clouds all moved slowly, lava-like toward a central formation directly above me, and there they stopped, became utterly motionless, engraved upon the sky. There was something ominous about that monstrous cloud bank, and in spite of the growing feeling of nausea, I watched it pass through a series of strange color metamorphoses, from a black to a greenish black, and from a decided green to a yellow, and from a yellow to a blinding, glaring red.

And then as I looked those clouds gradually opened; a ray of light pierced through as the aperture enlarged disclosing an enormous vault-shaped cavern cut through the stratus. The whole vision seemed to move nearer, as though magnified a

thousand times. And then towers, domes, streets, and walls took form, and these coagulated into a city painted stereoscopically in the sky. I forgot everything and lost myself in the weird panorama above me.

Crowds of men clothed in armor with high helmets were hurrying past in an endless procession. Regiment upon regiment of marching humanity were retreating as if from some enemy!

And then it came, a swarm of butterflies . . . enormous, ebony-black, carnivorous butterflies, approaching a doomed city. They met – the men and that strange form of life. But the defensive army and the gilded city seemed to be swallowed up.

Again a picture took form, but this time a design, gigantic, magnificent. There with its black wings outspread was the butterfly I had sought to catch. The whole sky was covered by its massive form.

It disappeared! The thunder mutterings now burst forth without warning in unrestrained fury. The clouds raced back again, erasing outline and detail, and there was only the gloom of a brooding, overcast sky.

I turned and plunged through the underbrush. Vines and creepers lashed at my face; knife reeds and swamp grass penetrated my clothing. Streak lightning of blinding brilliance, thunder belched forth from the sky. A wind sprang up, and the reeds and long grasses undulated before it like a thousand writhing serpents. The sullen water of the Mive was black now and racing in toward the shore in waves, and the thunder above swelled into crescendo.

Suddenly I threw myself upon the oozing ground and wormed my way deep into the undergrowth.

A moment later the giant butterfly raced out of the storm toward me. I could see its sword-like proboscis, its repulsive body, and I could hear its sucking inhalations of breath. *A thing of evil it was, transnormal, a hybrid growth from a paludinous place of rot and over-luxuriant vegetation.*

But I was well hidden in the reeds. The monster passed on unseeing. In a flash I was up and lunging on again. The crashing reverberations of the storm seemed to pound against me as if trying to hold me back. A hundred times I thought I heard that terrible flapping of wings behind me. But at last the road!

Without slackening speed, I ran on, away from the Mive, across the quivering flat, and on to the hills. At length exhaustion swept over me, and I fell gasping to the ground.

It seemed hours that I lay there, motionless, unheeding the driving rain on my back.

What had happened to me? And then I remembered. The fifteen-inch butterfly which had so startled me near the district of the Flan . . . I had tried to catch the thing, and it had escaped, leaving in my hand only a powderish substance that I had vainly brought to my lips. What had happened after that? A feeling of nausea had set in, like the immediate effects of a powerful drug. A strange insect of an unknown order, a butterfly and yet not a butterfly . . . Who knows what internal effect that powder would have on one? Had I been wandering in a delirium, caused by that powder from the insect's wings? And if so, where did the delirium fade into reality? The vision in the sky . . . a vagary of a poisoned brain perhaps, but the monstrosity which had pursued me and the telltale cocoon . . .

I looked back. There it lay, far below me, vague and indistinct in the deepening gloom, the black outlines of the cypress trees writhing in the night wind, silent, brooding, mysterious — the Mive.

WRITING ON THE WALL

The idea struck Professor John Bickering in a telephone booth in a drug store on West Seventeenth Street. Bickering had been heading for a book shop where he bought most of his volumes on psychology, when he remembered he had left his electric razor connected to his hotel room current.

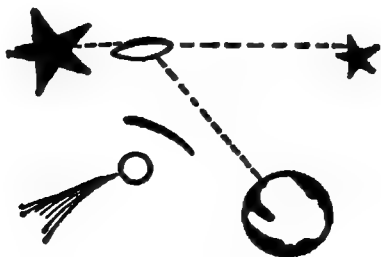
The razor was a gift from an aunt in Toledo. He hoped he could make contact with the hotel clerk before it would be ruined.

But once in the phone booth, Bickering noticed, absently at first, the markings on the wall. An instant later his call and the razor were forgotten.

The markings were familiar. He had seen them, or rather their counterparts, on the backs of old magazines, in book fly-leaves, wherever in fact some member of the American public found it necessary to pass time.

They were doodlings.

Bickering himself was often guilty of doodling. Whenever time was heavy on his hands, he found a scrap of paper and printed his name backwards. Then he enclosed the name in a neat square and topped the whole thing off with a heavy circle. But the marks on this wall were different. They looked like this:



For a long time the professor stood there in the cramped quarters of the booth, staring at the hieroglyphics. His thoughts rushed back to the recently-completed last passage of the twenty-third chapter of his new book:

It is true that instincts are but tested ideas and beliefs which have been passed germwise down through the generations and with which the progeny are endowed as soon as they become mentally conscious. The workings of the subconscious mind may be exaggerated examples of this mental inheritance.

Bickering had not given any undue amount of thought to that passage when he wrote it. It but paved the way for Chapter Twenty-four which was to deal with the 'subconscious mind'. But the book itself represented the professor's greatest undertaking. Originally entitled *Basic Thought Reactions to Certain Stimuli and Other Manifestations of a Psychological Nature Encountered in Certain Experiments*, the name had been shortened by the publisher in the advance contract to *Thought Roots*.

Bickering had put his all into the writing of that book. He had intended it to make himself the Charles Fort of the psychological world, and he had hoped to capture the Trolheim Award.

The Trolheim Award was a tidy sum. It was offered to the man who contributed the most valuable and unusual developments in this branch of science. With the money he thus hoped to win, the professor had set his heart on buying a house and private laboratory offered for sale in West Eureka on Highway Number Seven at County Road H. For weeks now he had dreamed of emptying his cramped hotel quarters of all their apparatus and moving to that suburban home.

Bickering was convinced that the first twenty-three chapters of his book were not only 'valuable', but distinctly 'unusual'. He had begun with the postulation that the Darwinian theory as applied to man was only partially correct; that man had not evolved entirely on this earth, but that he was undoubtedly of extra terrestrial origin; and that, therefore, the human intellect was not the result of eons of growth and development, but

rather of gradual disintegration from a super-intellect of some remote age.

But Chapter Twenty-four he felt was destined to be a distinct let-down. In it he had planned to discuss the subconscious mind. As yet, however, he had not come upon a single experiment to be considered worthy of including in the book.

Now as he stood there in the telephone booth an idea suddenly struck him. Doodlings, eh? Funny, he had never thought about them before. But they were the essence of subconscious activity. And this one was the most amazing example he had ever seen.

The professor took out his notebook and carefully made a copy of the drawing on the wall. Then he opened the booth door and motioned the drug clerk.

'I don't suppose you can tell me who drew this?'

The clerk craned his neck and looked puzzled. 'You from the telephone company?' he asked.

'No, I . . . I'm a detective,' Bickering lied glibly. He took out a huge calabash pipe, began to fill its bowl. 'I'm trying to trace someone, and I thought possibly you could . . .'

But the clerk could not tell. Everybody scribbled in telephone booths. The only thing he could say for certain was that the marks had not been there three weeks ago, for at that time the booth had been freshly painted.

Bickering realized that if he wanted to find the person who had made those marks – and to develop his idea for Chapter Twenty-four it was absolutely essential to find the doodler – he must find a more recent copy of them.

There was one factor in his favor. Doodlers always wrote the same words or made the same designs.

The professor made a thorough job of his search. He started on West Seventeenth Street and walked to Grant. From Grant to Aldrich, Aldrich to Oak, and Oak back to Seventeenth. At each shop and store which had a pay telephone he entered and examined the booth. He saw doodlings of a thousand different varieties, but none of the design for which he was searching.

Then in a corner cigar-store his luck returned. The telephone booth there was occupied by a perspiring heavy-set man. While talking, he was busy scribbling on the wall.

The design was the same as had caught Bickering's eye in the drug store.

Time seemed to drag interminably after that. But at length the man hung up the receiver, mopped his face and came out.

Bickering seized him by the arm.

'You drew that!' he announced.

The man backed away slowly.

'Don't be frightened,' Bickering said, 'I'm quite sane. I simply noticed those marks you made, and I'm wondering if you'd mind telling me why you drew them. You see, I'm a professor of psychology, and I'm writing a book called . . . well, never mind the title. Do you always draw that when you have nothing else to do?'

'Sure.' The heavy-set man smiled. 'Habit of mine. Don't mean a thing.' He turned and headed for the door.

'Wait.' Bickering ran after him. 'You don't realize, sir, how important this is. I'm on the verge of a great scientific discovery, and I need your help. When my book is published, those drawings you made on the telephone booth wall may make you a fortune and win you undying fame. I can't say for certain yet, but I believe your subconscious brain, alone among thousands, is capable of spanning the infinity of time and space.'

'You mean you're not selling something?' the man asked.

Impatiently Bickering shook his head and rapidly began to touch on the high points of the theory that lay behind his book. As the man listened, a spark of interest entered his eyes. At length he nodded slowly.

'Okay. I'm Mason Felspar of the Felspar Electric Company. If you really have something, I'm the guy that can be shown. Where do you live?'

Half an hour later in the cramped laboratory of his hotel apartment, the professor motioned Felspar to a chair and took out his notebook copy of the telephone drawings. Stacked about them on shelves and tables were strange pieces of apparatus, most of them Bickering's own inventions which he had used from time to time in conducting experiments.

'I'm going to analyze the marks on this drawing for you,' the professor said. 'You think they're meaningless because you've written the same ones thousands of times. The fact is they are a part of your subconscious brain.'

'Now look closely. At the top of the drawing you drew what is obviously a star. A little lop-sided perhaps, but still a star. And moving between the two stars is a cigar-shaped object.

'In the middle of the drawing, between the two stars, is a small ring with a tail, flanked by a curved line. At the bottom is a circle. Or let us call it a globe.'

'Just doodlings,' said Felspar. 'I've been doing it for years.'

'Now,' continued Bickering, unmindful of interruption, 'let us accept these marks for what they represent. We have then two stars, a globe, a cigar-shaped object, and a smaller globe, with a tail, or to boil it down still farther: two stars, this Earth, a projectile, and a comet. Crude as it is, the ring with the tail can only represent a comet. You even have the path of the trajectory, as shown by the curved line. Do you see?'

'I . . . that is . . . ' faltered Felspar.

'Now I don't know how much you know about the origin of man,' continued the professor. 'You may possibly have read of Mu and Atlantis. You may have read your Darwin, Heckel or Lamarck. But I believe the theories of those men to be full of discrepancies. It is possible that some races or all races did not develop on Earth at all, but were originally foreign to Earth and came from somewhere in extra terrestrial space. As an elementary example, that in itself would account for the many skin pigments and the great ethnological differences found today.'

Bickering paused to exhale a mouthful of tobacco smoke.

'And it is also true,' he said, 'that basic thoughts and ideas are handed down through the generations, a regular part of man's inheritance.'

'But what are you driving at?'

Bickering stiffened. 'Don't you see? I'm convinced that your drawings open the door to the past. They point conclusively to the fact that life on this Earth is not only the result of evolution but also mass migration from another planet. Looking at your drawing again:

'You have a projectile – a space ship, let us say, filled with life – leaving one planet of one star system, bound for another. Halfway a comet approaches the projectile's path and comes sufficiently close to alter the projectile's trajectory. What is the result? The projectile misses its destination and comes to rest

instead on Earth. And so powerful was the remembered thought of that occurrence it has continued down through thousands of years, through the brains of millions of men until it reached expression with you.'

Felspar sat rigid in his chair. His eyes were wide open, and rivulets of perspiration were trickling down his face.

'I'm double damned,' he said slowly.

Bickering opened a drawer in his desk, took out a sheet of paper, a pencil, and a ruler.

From a cabinet at the far wall he drew forth a concave piece of aluminum studded with tiny knobs, each of which was connected by a network of tiny wires. In the center of the top surface was a single quartz ball.

'Now,' he said, 'I'm going to try an experiment. I'm going to put this portable thought-amplifier on your head and leave you alone for an hour. There's nothing at all to fear. I've been using this thought-amplifier in my experiments for weeks, and it is . . . er . . . quite harmless. Unlike my brain-stimulator, it has no power connection but simply intensifies mildly the wave lengths of thought set up by your brain while in action. On this paper I want you to write anything and everything that comes into your head. Anything, do you understand? Try and give your subconscious brain free rein.'

Felspar nodded. The professor gently placed the aluminum disc on the man's head and adjusted a delicate control. Then he passed through a connecting doorway leading to his sitting room and closed the door behind him.

Finally the hour was up. Bickering returned to the room to find Felspar slumped disconsolately in the chair.

'I'm afraid it didn't work,' the heavy-set man said. 'That blamed salad bowl only gave me a headache, and I couldn't think of a thing to write except this. I . . . I don't even know what it means, but the words seemed to come of their own accord off the pencil.'

Bickering seized the paper and stared aghast. Over and over again in parallel lines Felspar had written:

FIRST WARNING. CEASE ACTIVITIES AT ONCE

Next day after an almost sleepless night Bickering came to a conclusion.

He must probe deeper into Felspar's subconscious brain, and he must do it in such a way that the man would be unaware of what was happening. He must find other 'patients' whose doodlings would be in harmony with Felspar's. Surely in a city of this size there must be other men and women whose inherited mental whims could be of significance and value. As for Felspar's written warning, that was a mystery which at present defied explanation.

The professor wrote ten pages of his Chapter Twenty-four describing his initial experiment with Felspar. He spent the afternoon making a tour of the city. By five o'clock he had discovered five other persons in different walks of life, each of whom was a highly specialized doodler.

'Flip' Talbot was a reporter on *The Evening Standard*. His subconscious markings consisted of a large round circle which Bickering accepted as the Universe. Near the center of the circle was a group of small dots which resembled the Milky Way. And off to the side was the age-old symbol of the sun, a circle bordered by many wavy lines.

The other four were of lesser importance. John Albright, a plumbing fixture salesman, drew interlocking triangles. The Halstead brothers made pyramids of squares and rectangles. And Miss Alice Reynolds, a pretty stenographer, drew a conglomeration of them all: squares, triangles, dots and circles.

By diplomatic persuasion and vague offers of potential fame Bickering succeeded in making the five agree to meet at his hotel room that evening at eight o'clock. Mason Felspar had already promised to be there.

Bickering knew of course that doodling was only done under certain conditions and that if he wanted his guests to work at the highest point of efficiency he must reproduce those conditions. He went, therefore, to the offices of the telephone company and interviewed the manager of the service department. He wanted, he said, five telephones installed on the wall of his hotel laboratory, to be ready within the hour.

The manager's jaw dropped. 'Five phones!' he gasped. 'What are you going to do with five phones?'

'You needn't mind connecting them,' Bickering said blandly. 'I simply want them mounted on the wall.'

From the phone company the professor made his way to the

Zephyr Music Store, where he purchased a portable electric phonograph and one record.

'We have some other nice records,' the clerk said.

Bickering shook his head. 'This one is quite sufficient.'

By the time he had returned to his hotel apartment, he found the five phones in their places, mounted on the laboratory wall.

Bickering fastened a pencil on a string to each phone. Then he opened a large packing case and took out his brain-stimulator. This was the machine he had spoken of to Felspar, simply an enlarged and more powerful version of the aluminum thought-amplifier. It was a large box-like affair with three Micro-Welman tubes and a series of intricate dials and verniers on its panel.

The professor had designed both the stimulator and the amplifier for psychology experiments in Chapters Five, Seven, and Nine. Both machines had worked successfully, and he had almost, but not quite, sold them to a manufacturer for professional distribution. Bickering had made five samples of the amplifier, but unfortunately under tests they had removed all of the patients' hair.

The stimulator also was constructed in accordance with the theory that the brain while in the process of thought sets up a vibratory field. When tuned to the proper wave length, it received those vibrations, strengthened them, and redirected them back to the brain through the ear.

Bickering got a screwdriver and a pair of pliers and set about connecting the receivers of the five telephones to the stimulator.

It was close to eight o'clock when he finished. Felspar was the first to arrive. The others followed promptly. By eight-fifteen Bickering was ready to begin his experiment.

'You are each to select a telephone,' he had told them, 'lift the receiver to your ear and wait. I won't tell you whether you will hear anything or not. But while you wait, do anything you wish. Scribble, write, doodle, anything. I'll return shortly.'

He placed one of the aluminum amplifiers on each of his guests' heads and then started the phonograph with the record he had purchased. It was Liszt's *Liebestraum*. There was an automatic repeat device, and the professor hoped the music would place his five guests in the proper mood. He switched on

the brain stimulator, passed into the next room and shut the door.

But when he returned to the laboratory twenty minutes later, he found things different than he had expected.

'Flip' Talbot, the reporter, had turned the record on the other side. It was playing *Classics in Swing*, and Alice Reynolds, the stenographer, had pushed her amplifier rakishly far back on her head and was beating the rhythm of the music on the chair arm with the palm of her hand.

The only person who had made a mark by his telephone was Felspar. On the wall he had written in a flowing hand:

SECOND AND LAST WARNING. YOU ARE INTERFERING WITH
FORCES BEYOND YOUR POWER. IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE
YOU WILL CEASE ACTIVITIES AT ONCE.

Bickering frowned as he gnawed his pipe stem and eyed Felspar shrewdly. Was the heavy-set man pulling his leg? But no, Felspar was staring at the wall, apparently stupefied by what he had written.

The repeated warning troubled Bickering. First warning of what? Who was doing the warning? Surely not Felspar. And what was all this prattle about forces beyond his power? Apparently greater stimulus was needed to make the experiment a success.

A thought came to Bickering then, and his eyes lighted. The brain stimulator derived its power from an ordinary six-volt storage battery. But he had been talking to the hotel engineer only yesterday, and that individual had offered him the use of a small auxiliary refrigeration dynamo in the hotel engine room.

'Better not say anything about it to the manager,' the engineer had said in his friendly way. 'And go easy when you make your connections. The thing sits right next to the main dynamo and the elevator motor, and there's plenty of hot juice there.'

Bickering took out a large coil of double insulated wire, connected one end to the brain stimulator and dropped the free end out the window. Then he rode down the elevator to the basement. The engineer was not in sight. Impatiently the professor opened a basement window and caught the other end of the wire. He proceeded to connect it to the refrigeration dynamo,

working with clumsy haste and paying no heed to the fact that the wire hung perilously close to a small sign which read:

DANGER. VOLTAGE.

Finished, he returned to his laboratory and switched on the brain stimulator again. The tubes glowed orange, then cherry red, and a dull drone came from the interior of the box.

The receivers of the five phones were still connected to the machine. Bickering motioned each of his guests to an instrument and sat down in a chair to await results.

Results were startling. Felspar picked up his telephone receiver and uttered a howl of pain. His face contorted into an expression of stark terror.

'Turn it off,' he yelled. 'Turn it off!'

But Bickering did not turn it off. He said quietly, 'Don't be frightened. I'm simply amplifying your thought processes. Try and relax.'

A wild light leaped into Felspar's eyes. Seizing the pencil, his hand jerked to the wall, began to move rapidly. He drew first his usual symbol: the two stars, globe, dot with a tail and cigar-shaped object. Then he began a new design.

The professor, who had stepped to his side, stared. With strangely artistic skill Felspar's pencil was flying back and forth, forming outlines and background. As he watched, Bickering saw the picture of a city take form. A city fantastic. There were two suns in the sky. There were streets and avenues, flanked by cube-shaped buildings. And here and there were groups of strange-looking creatures, like nothing Bickering had ever seen before.

Wafer-shaped heads, curious elongated bodies, a dozen appendages in the place of arms and legs – the creatures were for the most part lying on their backs. By the drawn expression on their faces they seemed – or did Bickering imagine this? – to be dying of suffocation.

Felspar was working frantically now. Beads of perspiration were on his brow, and his eyes were glassy, with a far-away expression.

In the center of his drawing he began to sketch a high platform, raised above the city. The perspective and the detail were in perfect proportion. On the platform a strange cylindrical

shape took form. There were fantastic insulators on its surface. On either side a network of wires and cables hung down. Workers clustered about it, gave the impression they were fighting against time to finish its construction. It was a weird, unreal drawing.

His pipe cold, the professor paced to the brain stimulator and turned the power rheostat another notch.

'Felspar,' he said, 'what are you drawing?'

Without hesitation the heavy-set man wrote:

'The city of Calthedra of the planet Lyra of the system, Aritorius.'

Professor Bickering gulped. 'What is happening on that planet?' he demanded.

'The citizens are building a titanic air preserve. The oxygen atmosphere of the planet is disappearing due to the rapid recession of the two suns. With this machine the citizens hope to capture the atmosphere of some other planet and transport it to their own.'

'When is this happening?'

Like a man in a trance Felspar wrote the answer:

'Now!'

Icy fear seemed to chill Bickering's spine. He had hoped to penetrate by way of the subconscious brain the mysteries of the past. But in some inexplicable way he was not doing that at all. He was delving into the secrets of time and space at the present instant. He was seeing across thousands of light years to another world.

What was the answer? Was it cosmic telepathy? Had he, by amplifying the thought vibrations of Felspar's brain, produced a wavelength which could annihilate time and distance and receive similar vibrations across almost infinite space?

One thing was certain. When he had transferred this to the written page, his book, his Chapter Twenty-four would be a masterpiece. Unquestionably the Trolheim Award would be his.

Not until then did Bickering become aware of the other occupants of the room. John Albright and the Halstead brothers were simply standing by as onlookers. But Alice Reynolds and 'Flip' Talbot were sketching on the wall beside their phones.

The reporter's writings were as yet indistinguishable, but the stenographer's, the professor saw to his amazement, included

the likeness of a huge cannon mounted on a rectangular base. Shooting from the muzzle of that gun was a cigar-shaped object. A projectile!

Hands trembling, Bickering turned the power of his brain stimulator to its last notch.

He saw then that 'Flip' Talbot was writing a series of statements in column form. They read:

The chemical content of the atmosphere of the planet Earth is, with the exception of a deficiency of coronium, similar to that of Lyra.

It is absolutely vital to all Lyranians that our atmosphere be replenished. Because of the cosmic recession of our two suns, heat on Lyra is diminishing, vegetation is dying, and as a result oxygen and nitrogen are escaping.

Migration from Lyra to Earth is at the present time impossible. Both the size and expense of such an undertaking make it impractical. Also, as our astronomers have proved, the nearby double nebula will produce a new sun within a comparatively short period of time. This new sun will amply replace the two that are now receding into space.

In our dying moments we are making a last and final attempt to capture that which is essential to our life. We are shooting a projectile to Earth. This projectile the moment it lands will automatically begin the process of capturing the Earth's atmosphere, breaking it down into its component atomic parts and storing it under pressure.

As the need demands, that atomic matter will be hurled into the fourth dimensional continuum and transported through a disruption of the spacetime coordinates back to Lyra. In short, the projectile, once it is on Earth, will serve as a branch power station, replenishing our atmosphere. It will arrive . . .

Bickering leaped to the reporter's side and gripped his arm. 'Will arrive when?' he shouted. 'When?'

There was a blank stare in Talbot's eyes as his pencil moved over the wall:

First January, 1944, 11 p.m., Earth time!

With a wild cry Bickering glanced at the clock. It was ten o'clock. In one hour the greatest event in the history of mankind would occur. In one hour the first projectile from an outer planet would reach this Earth. And he — John Bickering — was the first person to be aware of its passage.

He had been wrong in his analyzation of Felspar's first drawing. No comet would change the trajectory of this projectile's path, for the simple reason that there was not any comet. This event was not one which had happened in ages past. It was happening now. Felspar's first drawing had been a blind. Apparently the citizens of the planet Lyra could not prevent the transmission of their secret by way of his subconscious drawings, but they had changed the details so as to give a completely wrong impression.

The professor raced across the room to the one 'good' telephone.

'I'm going to call the newspapers,' he cried. 'It's the story of the age.'

But he got only half way. Felspar, who had been standing motionless, suddenly lifted one arm above him.

'Stop!' he cried.

Bickering turned. There was a quality and a tone to Felspar's voice that was altogether foreign. The man's face was crimson now; his breathing was coming in short gasps.

'Stop,' he repeated. 'You are to make no move to warn the people of your race of the projectile's arrival. 'You are to keep the facts you have learned in this room to yourself.'

'Are you mad?' Bickering demanded. And then like a flash of light he understood.

The race of that other planet to whose movements he had tuned in were aware of his activities. They were acting through Felspar's brain to prevent information of their plans being broadcast. Felspar was but a robot responding to their command. He had no conscious knowledge of what he was doing.

Why? Because they knew there was not sufficient atmosphere on Earth for two planets. Once the projectile had landed and begun its operations, the population of Earth would be doomed.

Unmindful of Felspar, Bickering gave a mighty leap toward the phone.

But Felspar, equally agile in spite of his bulk, darted to the

laboratory table and scooped up a bottle of acid. Poising it over his head he emitted a wild shout.

'We all die together, Bickering . . . you, myself, and the others,' he cried. 'They whose thoughts you have been reading have willed it so!'

Bickering could see the man's facial muscles contract as he made ready to hurl the acid. And then . . .

Then the door of the elevator somewhere on the floors below clanged harshly. Through the silence the cage began to drone up the shaft.

Simultaneously the brain stimulator machine on the table erupted into life. Bickering remembered with a start the hotel engineer's warning about the refrigeration dynamo's proximity to the main dynamo and the elevator motor. He remembered too that in his haste he had made haywire connections. The filaments of the three Micro-Welman tubes lit up like incandescents. The panel began to vibrate violently, and the dials whirled of their own accord.

The elevator reached the floor level of the outer corridor. Suddenly an arc of purplish fire shot from the brain stimulator. There was a terrific roar as the box flew into a thousand fragments. Bickering felt himself hurled across the room and bludgeoned against the far wall. A cloud of fallen plaster and debris rose up in a choking cloud, and a blaze of colored lights whirled in his vision. Then blackness, and he knew no more . . .

Hours later when Bickering opened his eyes, the white walls of a hospital were about him, and the familiar figure of Mason Felspar stood beside the bed.

'What . . . what happened?' the professor asked weakly.

'Plenty,' replied Felspar. 'But you're supposed to lie quiet and not talk and . . .'

'Tell me!' demanded Bickering.

'Well -' the heavy-set man touched gingerly a bulky bandage on his forehead - 'I don't know exactly. I brought you here and signed you in under another name. You see the hotel manager is madder than a wet hen. The last I saw of him, he was standing on the sidewalk, looking up at a big hole in the hotel wall and wringing his hands.'

'I don't care about the hotel manager,' cried the professor. 'What happened?'

Felspar shrugged. 'All I can say is that I wasn't responsible for what I did or wrote there in your room. Once you had that salad-bowl on my head and turned on that machine, another power seemed to be in control of my thoughts. Talbot and the girl, Reynolds, said the same. By a miracle none of us was hurt, but the hotel is a wreck. If you want to get all the dope, why don't you turn on your radio? It's just about time for the noon news broadcast.'

Bickering reached across the table beside his bed and turned the switch of the radio there. A man's voice was talking:

'... and at a late hour authorities were still mystified as to the cause of the explosion at the Sheridan Hotel ... Continuing our survey of world news: ... Washington, D.C., the U.S. Navy Department reported today that Allied battle-ships operating in the Caribbean Sea sighted and sank what appeared to be a Nazi super-submarine of enormous size.

'The mystery U-boat was discovered near Belize, British Honduras, and was apparently having engine trouble, since it made no attempt to submerge. No member of the craft's crew was in evidence at any time, but when Allied warships approached, hidden weapons firing what was described as "a powerful electric bolt" attempted to bombard them.

'A communiqué from the Nazi capital disclaims any knowledge of such a super-sub, and stories told by witnesses at Belize of seeing a great crimson streak in the sky and observing a black cigar-shaped object fall into the sea have been discredited ... This concludes the news broadcast for today. Goodbye until tomorrow.'

Bickering looked across the bed and rubbed his jaw with his unbandaged hand.

'So it was true,' he said slowly. 'Do you realize, Felspar, what this means? It means that complete destruction, complete spatial doom was saved us by a hairsbreadth.'

Felspar swallowed hard and said nothing.

'And yet I wonder,' Bickering continued, 'I wonder if it matters so much. After all, man has been spared annihilation from without, but now he's left to fight and kill himself off by wars of his own making.'

THE FACE IN THE WIND

Today is Tuesday. For almost a week, or since the morning of last Wednesday when the dark significance of the strange affair was first publicly realized, my life and the quiet routine of Royalton Manor have been thrown into a miserable state of confusion. It was of course to be expected, all details considered, and I took it upon myself to answer carefully all questions and repeat again and again for each succeeding official the part I played in the prologue to the mystery. Doubtless the London press was justified in referring to the sequence of events as the Royalton Enigma; yet in so doing it aroused a morbid curiosity that has made my position even more bewildering. For the story which I told, and which I know to be true, has been termed impossible and merely the wanderings of a crazed brain.

Let me begin by saying that like my fathers before me, I have lived here at Royalton all the days of my life, and I have seen the manor dwindle from an imposing feudal estate to a few tottering buildings and a small plot of weed-choked ground. Time and times have gone hard with the house of Hampstead.

There are, or rather *were* until last Wednesday, but two of these buildings occupied. Both in a considerable state of disrepair, I had reserved the right lower wing of the one which in earlier years boasted the name Cannon Tower, for myself and my books. The other, an ivy-covered cottage, formerly the gardener's quarters, I had given over to an old woman some four months before. Her name was Classilda Haven.

Classilda Haven was a curious individual. A hundred times I have sat at my desk watching her through the open window as she cultivated her patch of vegetables, and I have racked my brain for a reasonable excuse to remove her from my property. The woman, according to her own statement, was nearly eighty; her body was bent and weazened, and her face witch-like and ugly with the mark of age. But it was her eyes that

bothered me, drew my gaze every time she came within my vision. They were black, heavily browed, and sharp and clear as a young girl's.

At intervals when I have taken my morning walk through the old grounds, along the ruined frog wall, as I still prefer to call it, and on to the edge of Royalton Heath, I have felt those eyes staring after me. It was imagination, of course; nothing more. There has always been to my mind something grotesque in senility, something repelling in the gradual wasting away of all human qualities day by day.

Classilda Haven had stumped up to my door one evening late in April and inquired in a cracked voice if I wished to let the old gardener's cottage. She was a stranger to the district, I knew, and a woman of her age hobbling about unsheltered at that season is bound to be an object of pity. I asked casually if she had no relatives, no home; to which she replied that her son, her only means of support, had been killed in a motor lorry accident in London a week before. She had taken her few savings and entrained for Royalton, where she seemed to remember a distant relative was living. Arriving in the village she had found no trace of him, and so, without money, had wandered aimlessly down the Gablewood Pike.

There was, of course, no refusing such a plea, and much as I disliked having my solitude interrupted, I had given her the key to the cottage, loaned her a few sticks of furniture, and tried to make her comfortable. In due time, I presumed, the relative would make his appearance and the woman would go on her way.

But as the spring gradually wore into summer and these things did not happen, I began to look upon the old crone as a fixture. Not until August did the horror begin, and then I had undying reason to regret my philanthropy.

It began with Peter Woodley. Woodley was a youth of twenty, a son of merchant villagers, in whom I had taken considerable interest. The boy aspired to paint. He had no unusual talent, it is true, yet his canvases had a certain simplicity in their likeness to surrounding landscapes that had caught my eye, and I had given him two or three art volumes that had found their way into the Hampstead library.

But on this morning as he stood in my study he appeared greatly excited and upset. His hair was clawed in wild disarray,

and he was breathing hard, as if he had run to the manor all the way from Royalton.

'Mr Hampstead,' he gasped, 'it isn't true, is it, the story I heard in the village? You're - you're not going to change the frog wall?'

I leaned back in my chair. 'The frog wall?' I repeated. 'Why yes, Woodley, I'm going to have it repaired. Repaired, that's all. It's badly in need of work, and the masons are coming tomorrow. But what on earth—'

Young Woodley dropped into the chair opposite me and spread his hands flat on the desk top.

'You mustn't do it, sir. You can't. You promised me I could use it for one of my pictures.'

'Why, so I did,' I said smiling. 'I had forgotten. But I'm not changing the entire wall - just the two sections on either side of the gate. The stones have fallen almost entirely away, and I don't want the frogs to get through. That's the only reason for the wall being there, you know, Peter. The marsh on the other side is swarming with frogs. The wall was erected by my ancestors to keep the manor grounds free from the pests and permit the Hampsteads to sleep . . . If it's rustic settings for your paintings you want, there are plenty of places—'

'But you don't understand, sir.' Woodley in his earnestness was leaning far across the desk. 'You don't understand. There's something on the other side of that wall besides frogs. There's something in that marsh that will get out, that will come into the grounds if you have the wall altered. I can't say what, sir. I really don't know what. But if you'd been out there at night in the moonlight, staring at the gate as I have, trying to see how I wanted to place my painting, you'd know.'

I looked at him curiously there in the morning light of my study. 'The wall is already down in those two places,' I replied. 'If there's anything in the marsh, and I'm quite sure there isn't, it certainly could get through now.'

Woodley shook his head slowly, half in negative, half in perplexity.

'It's not the physical boundary I mean,' he said. 'It's not the wall itself. It's the actual space and time that it's occupied all these years that you're changing. Mr Hampstead, don't do it!'

Naturally, such vague innuendoes did not induce me to

countermand my order to the masons. Yet as the hours passed, something in the memory of Woodley's disturbing attitude instilled in me an indefinable sense of nervousness. Several times I caught myself staring out of the window toward the decayed remnants of the old frog wall, wondering what the boy had meant.

I turned at length to the shelves of the Hampstead library and spent two hours among the ancient volumes there, trying to rest my curiosity. The diaries of each successive resident of the manor were still intact, and I knew they included all mention of wine-cellar, out-houses and rooms which had been added to Cannon Tower during the generations. Curiously enough, however, search as I would, I could find no allusion to the erection of the frog wall, save one and this, in the last memoirs of one Lemuel Hampstead 1734, was most confusing. It read:

The Frogg Wall, which I have ordered builded, will this day be finished, God willing, and I am now contente to departe from this world and bestowe my title and possessions upon my eldest son. There will be no more tragedyes like that which befelle my father, Charles Ulrich, and his wife, Lenore. The wall will be blessed by the church in the manner which I have planned, and there will be a Holie Bible sealed in each corner poste. I—

Here age had left its mark on the page and the writing became undecipherable. But vague and meaningless as it all was, it was enough to set me thinking hard.

I personally supervised the masons' work the following day. It was a prosaic affair. The two workers simply removed the crumbling bits of stone from the two sections of the wall flanking the gate and patched the aperture with modern bricks. But they were forced to move the gate forward a few feet because of the marshy condition of the ground.

Classilda Haven shambled up to me as I stood watching the men ply their trowels. She smiled a toothless, evil smile.

'Ye'll be changin' the frog wall, I see,' she said in her rasping voice. 'All of it?'

'No, just the two sections,' I replied, viewing her presence with some irritation.

The aged woman nodded, and I found myself staring again into her strange eyes. They were young, those eyes, clear and piercing, and they seemed oddly incongruous there in the wrinkled, leather-like face.

She turned abruptly, hobbled forward a few steps, and, head down like a bird, stared at one of the workmen as he carefully placed his bricks in position. Gingerly she ran a veined hand along the newly mortised surface then looked up and shrilled:

‘Why don’t you tear it all down?’

I forced a tolerant smile. ‘Don’t be absurd, Classilda,’ I said. ‘If I did such a thing, the place would be overrun with frogs, your garden as well. You know that.’

She made a queer reply, an answer which seemed to escape from her involuntarily.

‘Frogs,’ she squeaked, her eyes gleaming queerly. ‘I like frogs. I like them better than anything in the world.’

Peter Woodley came that afternoon with his easel and his box of paints. I saw him through the window of my study as he selected a position near the iron gate-door, opened his little folding camp-stool, and began to walk slowly back and forth along the side of the newly repaired wall.

His agitation, which had been so pronounced the day before, seemed to have left him, though I couldn’t help but feel that he looked upon the renovated stonework with resigned eyes. He moved about several times before he apparently found the angle he desired, then seated himself and began what I presumed were the charcoal outlines.

My book attracted my attention then, and I forgot the boy for perhaps an hour. But suddenly I was jerked out of my chair by an ear-splitting scream. With a lurch I was across the floor and staring through the open casement at the weed-tangled grounds.

Peter Woodley lay prone on his face by his easel, his body still as death!

I raced out of the house and across the intervening space with all the speed I could muster. A moment later, as I examined him, I breathed a sigh of relief. He was still alive, but his heart was fluttering weakly. Cold water applied to his forehead and smelling-salts administered to his nostrils brought him

around five minutes later, but when his eyes blinked open and he looked up at me, a moan of terror came to his lips.

'Good God! Mr Hampstead!' he whispered. 'I saw it! It was beautiful, but it was horrible. I saw it!'

'Saw what?' I asked, chafing his wrists. 'In heaven's name, Peter, what's the matter?'

He struggled to his feet then, swayed dizzily and stepped over to his easel. For a moment he stood there, staring down at the few charcoal outlines on the canvas. Then he slumped weakly onto the camp-stool and buried his head in his hands.

'Mr Hampstead,' he said, looking up abruptly, 'promise me you'll never let me come here again. Promise me you'll keep me away from the manor grounds, by force if necessary. I must never attempt to paint that wall again, do you understand? And you, sir, couldn't you lock this place up and move into the village? Couldn't you, sir?'

There was sincere anxiety written across his face, and his eyes were still gazing far out into space with a bewildered frightened expression that was foreign to the boy's usually calm nature.

'Nonsense, Peter,' I replied. 'You've been working too hard. You've let your imagination run away with you, that's all. Come into the Tower, and I'll give you a drop of brandy.'

He shook his head, muttered something incoherently under his breath, and then, picking up his painting equipment, turned and strode quickly through the manor grounds toward the distant Gablewood Pike.

For a while I stood there, watching his figure grow smaller and smaller in the afternoon sunlight. I was puzzled more than I cared to admit by his strange attitude, and I was deeply disturbed by his allusions to 'something which he had seen'. For obviously as strapping a fellow as young Woodley does not faint dead away from sheer imagination. Neither does he babble queer warnings to a man twice his age without a reason.

And then as I turned and began to walk slowly toward the door of my study, my eyes suddenly took into focus a patch of ground near the old wall. The workmen repairing this section had, in order to aid their movements, torn up the weeds and rank underbrush, which grew unmolested in this part of the property.

And there in the freshly upturned earth was the imprint of a gigantic bird-like claw.

It was ten minutes past twelve that night when I found myself sitting up in bed staring at the radium dial of the taboret clock. Cannon Tower was still as death, and there was no sound from without save the distant mournful croaking of frogs beyond the wall. Even as I listened, that bass obbligato ceased abruptly, and the world lapsed into a heavy, ringing silence.

I got up, slid into a pair of slippers and moved across to the window. Curious. If there is one thing that is a certainty in my life, it is my profound manner of sleeping. Once retired I seldom if ever awake before my usual rising hour. And yet there I was, eyes wide open, heart thumping madly with the terror and bewilderment of one who has been jerked suddenly from the macabre fantasies of a nightmare.

But I had not been sleeping. Neither, I was positive, had any unusual sound disturbed my slumbers. The manor grounds stretched below me, blue under the August moonlight like a motionless quilt, and beyond, vague and indistinct, I could see the flat, barren expanse of Royalton Heath.

A thin blanket of clouds slid over the moon then, darkening the shadows into a thick, brooding umbra and simultaneously it happened.

From the east, from somewhere deep in the recesses of the marsh that lay beyond the frog wall, there rose into the still air a horrible, soul-chilling cry. It was a cry I can never hope to forget, the scream of a bird of prey about to make its kill, a thousand times magnified, and ending in a high-pitched shriek that was strangely human.

Motionless I stood there, eyes riveted in the direction of the old wall, muscles tense as wire. For a moment I saw nothing, the blackness below me was thick and impenetrable. Then suddenly, with the quickness of a camera-shutter, the moon broke through that cloud mass once more, and the manor grounds returned to their blue silver.

The cry came again, nearer. The echo thrown back from the walls of Cannon Tower passed on into the distance like the wail of a lost soul, and with a choking gasp I turned my eyes skyward.

High above me, outlined against the driven cloud, circling like a giant vulture in the night, was a bird of colossal size. Its wing-spread was enormous, a full twenty feet from tip to tip, and its head and body were curiously elongated and heavy. Even as I stood there, staring at it, my face wet with terror, it wheeled and swooped toward me.

Forward, straight toward the Tower it sped as if intent on dashing itself to pieces against the ancient masonry. Then it veered sharply and raced toward my window.

An instant I stood there, transfixed. Then, my subconscious mind had enough clarity to whip me around and send me lurching back into the room. There was a century-old percussion pistol on the right-hand wall, mounted in its carved metal holster, and I knew it was always loaded, a feeble but comforting protection in my solitude.

In the half-darkness I seized it, pushed the hammer to full cock, leaped back to the window and fired.

There came an instantaneous violent flapping of those mighty wings, an over-powering stench of death and decay, and crashing into my ear-drums a repetition of that hideous cry. The specter disappeared.

Faintness seized me then. Spots and queer-colored lights swirled in my vision, and I sank backward to the floor. But even as I closed my eyes to unconsciousness I knew, as I know now, that what I had seen was no dream, no vagary of a sleep-drugged brain.

For gazing at me there, with its huge feathered wings and repulsive vulture body, had been the face of a beautiful woman!

A bad electrical storm came up next day after almost three weeks of sultry heat. I spent the morning pottering about my studio as usual. Outside, the thunder crashed and boomed ceaselessly.

But come afternoon I refused to be kept indoors any longer, and so, donning an old rain-jacket, I began my usual walk through the manor grounds. I was still weak and trembling from my unexplainable experience of the night before.

The rain was coming down hard from a thick, gray sky, and the weeds and undergrass flanking the little path were dripping with wet. Behind me the great vine-covered walls of Cannon Tower loomed grim and silent.

At the gate-door of the frog wall I suddenly stopped. The barrier, always locked with staple and bolt, stood wide open, revealing just beyond the wild, undulating expanse of the marsh. I moved to close it, but a moment later Classilda Haven appeared, working her way up the reed-covered incline toward me. And for some unknown reason I viewed her presence there with suspicion.

'Classilda,' I snapped, 'who gave you permission to go beyond the gate?'

Her clothes and her hair were dripping with rain, and the dishevelment gave to her, it seemed, a curiously repelling or-nithoid appearance. It was odd, but never until that moment had I noticed how distinctly avian were the contours of her weazened body and her talon-like hands. She cocked her head to one side, looked at me, and laughed a squeaky laugh.

'I've been down in the marsh,' she said. 'I went to get some dirt for my garden. Those workmen, the careless fools, have trampled all over it.'

I glanced at the orderly rows of lettuce and cabbages which in some places had been crushed and overturned by unobserving feet.

'Not workmen,' I said. 'I'm afraid it was young Woodley that did this. I shall have to tell him to be more careful. He comes here to paint, you know, at night sometimes in the moonlight, and I suppose he didn't notice where he walked. But,' I added, remembering his words and firm decision which he had made following his fainting spell, 'I don't think you'll be troubled with him any more. He's taken a dislike for the place, and he's staying away.'

The old crone stood looking at me with those youthful, beady eyes. She smoothed some of the water from her black dress, shifted her basket of dirt to her other hand and smiled cryptically.

'Not too much of a dislike, Mr Hampstead,' she said, displaying her toothless gums. 'He was here last night, painting. I spoke with him.'

I stared at her. If both Classilda Haven and Peter Woodley had been awake and in the manor grounds during the night, then they too must have seen the hideous thing which had flown out of the marsh and looked in my bedchamber window. All the

horror of what I had seen, all the terror of that nocturnal vision which the intervening hours had inclined to soften and pale in my memory, returned then, and I leaned weakly against the bole of a cypress tree.

'Classilda,' I began slowly, 'were you – did you see—'

But with a swish of her sodden skirts the old woman turned, laughed that mirthless falsetto laugh once more, and hobbled off toward her cottage.

Deeply troubled, I buttoned my jacket closer about my throat and continued my walk through the slanting rain. I was heading for the edge of Royalton Heath, where, as was my custom, I would stop a moment and gaze out over that somber stretch of wasteland which I had known for so many years. But this time my leisurely walk was destined to be interrupted.

Near the end of the manor grounds where the frog wall turned abruptly to the left and headed into the depths of the marsh, I came upon Peter Woodley. Hatless and without coat of any kind, he was sitting in the long, brown weeds, unmindful of the swirling rain and apparently oblivious of my approach. And in his hands were two impossible things.

For a full instant I stood there gazing at him, watching his hands as they worked diligently at their task. Then I cleared my throat and spoke:

'Peter,' I said, 'what on earth are you doing with that bow and arrow? I thought you were an artist, not a huntsman.'

He started, leaped to his feet, and tried to conceal the two articles upon which he had been working. But as if through a telescope my eyes centered upon the arrow-shaft. It was the metallic arrow-head that held my gaze, a head long and slender, ending in a needle-point and made of silver.

Without answer Peter Woodley wrapped the two articles in a piece of canvas and seized a larger package from the ground, a package I had not noticed before.

'With your permission, sir,' he said, 'I'd like to walk back with you to the Tower. I finished my picture of the wall last night, and I'd like to hear what you think of it.'

Fifteen minutes later, bent over the desk in my study, I stared down upon Woodley's newly painted canvas. The lowering clouds without had spread a premature darkness in the

room, and I had lighted two of the candelabra. But even with this added illumination I could not quite believe my eyes.

For a long time I stood there, looking down at the oily brush marks, examining the background and the objects in the center. Then with a gasp of incredulity I sank into a chair.

'Peter, my boy!' I exclaimed, 'did you actually paint this? It's excellent - a masterpiece!'

He looked suddenly wan and haggard as he seated himself opposite me and began to run his fingers absently along the design of the table.

'Yes,' he said dully, 'I did it. There are a few remaining touches to be added before it is completed, but the painting as you see it is the work of a few hours. I worked last night in your grounds by moonlight. I - I wish to God I hadn't.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

He nervously lit a cigarette and leaned forward in his chair.

'Mr Hampstead,' he said, 'that painting - I simply can't realize it came from my brush, done by my own hand. I meant to paint a simple likeness of the old frog wall with the iron gate in the center. But as I worked there in the moonlight, something seemed to take hold of me. I felt as if a will other than my own were controlling my thoughts. I painted as I have never painted before, worked at terrific speed in a nervous frenzy. And when I had finished I was in a state of complete exhaustion.'

'I don't understand it, sir,' he went on. 'Sometimes I think I've been going mad the last few days. But there's something wrong with that picture, something terribly wrong. Every time I look at it I have a dreadful feeling it never should have been brought into creation.'

'Nonsense, Peter,' I said, looking across the desk at the propped-up canvas. 'You've done an admirable piece of work. Frankly, I didn't think you had it in you. None of your earlier efforts have displayed such unusual talent as this.'

Woodley left half an hour later, but not before I had persuaded him to leave the painting in my care.

'I'd like to study it if you don't mind,' I told him. 'I'm planning to go to London next month, and I may want to take this along. Perhaps I can place it in a contest for you, or if not, find someone who would like to buy it.'

He seemed little affected by my words. Ordinarily any compliment I might bestow upon his work would have been received with boyish enthusiasm and appreciation of my interest. But now he stood there in the doorway, hands hanging at his sides, eyes lowered as if he were oppressed by some mental cloud.

When he had gone I carefully shut all the doors to my study, returned to my desk and moved the painting a few inches farther back where there was no chance of shadow impairing my view of it. Then I trundled the heavy armchair into the center of the room to a position about four feet directly before the desk, sat down, and deliberately fastened my eyes upon the canvas.

I confess that at the moment there was nothing positive in my mind which would account for my actions. But from the first moment I had gazed down upon the picture I had realized that young Woodley's strange speech was not the result of an overwrought imagination. Quite definitely there was something wrong with the painting. Something wrong, I say, and yet I was unable to see anything in the oil presentation beyond a simple and familiar scene.

That scene had been beautifully done, it is true. There was the old frog wall and the black bulk of the huge gate-door with the blur of the marsh in the background. The coloring and effect of the mellow moonlight had been accomplished with rare artistry, and it did not seem possible that so inexperienced and untrained a youth as Peter Woodley could have wielded a brush with such finesse. And yet more and more as I stared across at it there came the impression that I was looking upon something indescribably evil.

For perhaps ten minutes I remained there, studying each brush mark in the flickering glare of the two candelabra. Then abruptly, acting on impulse, I stepped across the room and unhooked the long framed mirror which adorned the farther wall.

I placed the painting now at an angle on the right-hand corner of the desk. And at the opposite corner, lengthwise on a parallel, I set the mirror.

Returning to my chair, I adjusted my position slightly, then looked hard at the reflection in the mirror. Beyond the fact that

the glass vision thus seen was the usual reverse of the original, there was no change.

But an instant later, with a choking cry I had leaped from the chair and, face down, had pressed my eyes to the looking-glass. In God's name, what I had seen could not possibly be true! It was a trick of my thoughts, a mental image projected into the droning solitude by a still persistent and bewildered memory. But no . . .

Clearly focused in the mirror was the reflection of Peter Woodley's painting in oil. But my eyes had caught a different angle to the lines now, the perspective had changed, and where before I had seen only the likeness of the frog wall and the iron gate-door, and the marsh – in place of that was – a woman's face!

It was incredible, and it was incredibly beautiful. A woman's face returning my gaze silently – with black lustrous hair, Grecian features, and lips that were curved in a slight mocking smile; an exquisite face painted with classic loveliness but with strange piercing eyes I seemed to remember having seen once and many times before.

Many moments I remained there, staring far into the glass. Then I reached for the decanter, poured myself a strong, undiluted portion of whisky and slumped dazedly into the chair. My brain was going round and round, my heart pounding like a trip-hammer.

It would have been a most curious enigma, this optical illusion, this accidental use of the double perspective, even had I looked upon a reflected object thus that was new and foreign. But when I stopped to realize that what I saw there was not only familiar but engraved in my brain in a hideous memory of the immediate past, the whole vision became alive with horrific possibilities.

For the woman's face which looked back at me from the reflection of the looking-glass was the same face I had seen in the head of that loathsome flying monster that had peered into my bed-chamber the night before!

I ate no dinner that evening. As dusk darkened into night and the thunder and rain dwindled off, I sat by the window of my study, staring out into the dripping grounds, drawing deeply on my old Hoxton pipe. The hours passed slowly. By

ten o'clock the last remaining cloud had left the sky, and the moon rode high and clear.

I roused myself then, and still smoking furiously, let myself out of Cannon Tower and through the garden exit into the manor grounds. In contrast to the gloominess of the afternoon, the way before me now was brilliant under the blue light and tessellated with curious elliptical shadows from the overhanging verdure. Off in the marsh, the frogs, still unaware no doubt of the complete cessation of the storm, were silent.

I walked slowly, head down, immersed in my thoughts. When I reached the high gate-door in the wall, I paused a moment, reflecting how perfectly young Woodley had caught the moonlit scene in his painting. Then, knowing that sleep would be impossible under the circumstances, I crossed over to an old tree-stump, wiped the rainwater from its surface with my handkerchief, and sat down.

How long I remained there in the half-darkness I don't know. The moon moved high in the heavens and began to descend toward the west. I filled and lighted my pipe several times.

But suddenly the snapping of a twig whipped me out of my reverie, and I turned to see Classilda Haven slowly advancing down the path. I watched her casually. Then I sat bolt upright, huddled farther back in the shadow, and stared with a rising feeling of perplexity.

What was the old crone doing in the grounds at this hour? And why was she skulking forward like a wary snake, looking back over her shoulder at each step to see if she were followed?

A moment later I was pressed close against the bole of a cypress tree, muscles stiffened to attention. With a final look behind her, Classilda Haven had stepped to the iron gate-door, unlatched the staple and pin, and was swinging the barrier slowly open. One instant she hesitated, head cocked to one side, listening. Then she pressed through the aperture and disappeared in the direction of the marsh.

For a quarter of an hour I held my position, waiting for her to return. Far back in a corner of my brain a vague suspicion was beginning to grow, and I sought for an answer to the woman's strange actions.

Then it happened! The iron gate opened again – slowly,

and a figure stepped into the shadows. It was not Classilda Haven. It was a woman who did not resemble the old crone in any way. She was young, tall, dressed in filmy white, with long raven hair that cascaded down her back. A moment she paused there, her hand on the latch. Then she moved into the open moonlight, and I jerked electrified to attention.

That face again – divinely beautiful with a satin complexion, carmine lips, and eyes black and piercing! The same face I had seen once flying in the night and again in the changed perspective of Peter Woodley's painting! Was I going mad?

The woman seemed to glide slowly forward, to float down the path as though her feet were treading air. Presently she moved closer to the frog wall, raised one arm high over her head and began to move it up and down, back and forth, in long sweeping arcs.

She was writing! Writing in chalk! I saw that as the moonlight streaming through the trees focused the crumbling masonry and the silent figure in blue relief. A foot high and carefully fashioned in curious stilted lines the characters took form.

The word completed, the woman stepped back and studied it carefully. I looked out from my hidden position behind the tree and read:

'CELAENO'

The chalk word seemed to gleam like white fire against the gray darkness of the old wall, and although I could not at the moment fathom its meaning, it touched a responsive chord somewhere in my memory. Celaeno. It seemed—

There was something weirdly impossible in it all. Standing there deep in the shadow of the huge cypress tree, my unlighted pipe clenched tightly between my teeth, I felt as if I were viewing the scene from the doorway of another world.

The woman moved farther down the wall to a position on the other side of the iron gate-door. Abruptly she stopped again, raised the chalk and scrawled in those same stilted letters:

'CELAENO'

I thought then I had unwittingly made my presence known, for the woman, upon completion of the last letter, whirled and

turned those penetrating eyes straight in my direction. But it was another sound which she had heard, a sound of slow footsteps advancing down the path.

In measured pace they came on, louder and louder, like the rhythmic cadence of a muffled mallet. An instant later another figure came upon the scene, and a new wave of bewilderment swept over me.

It was Peter Woodley – Woodley clad in an old green dressing-robe, with his eyes closed and his arms stretched stiffly before him in the manner of a sleep-walker. Straight toward the woman in white he advanced, step by step.

‘I’m coming, Celaeno,’ he whispered. ‘Celaeno . . . I love you, Celaeno.’

As he drew nearer, a slight smile turned the woman’s lips. I saw it in the moonlight. And she leaned forward, grasped the boy by the right arm and began to lead him toward the gate.

But there, as the iron door swung open of its own accord, a change came over Woodley. His eyes flickered open, his body stiffened, and a hoarse cry sounded deep in his throat. On the instant he seemed to realize what was happening. He wrenched his arm away from the woman’s grasp, turned, and with a scream of terror began to run down the path toward the Gablewood Pike.

Transfixed, I stood there, looking after him. He fled like a deer, running wildly across the open patches of moonlight, the skirts of his green dressing-robe swirling after him. And when I again turned my eyes to the scene before me, three inexplicable things had happened.

The woman in white had disappeared; the iron gate-door was locked and pinioned from the outside; and the two chalk words scrawled upon the frog wall were no longer there!

Peter Woodley slammed open the door of my study next morning and strode into the room without knocking. I was thankful that he had come. There were a thousand questions I meant to ask, the whole fantastic mystery to discuss. It was time, I realized, to talk openly.

But Woodley brushed aside my preliminary remarks with a wave of his hand.

‘My painting,’ he cried. ‘Where is it? I’m going to tear it apart bit by bit and throw the pieces in the fire! Give it to me!’

I stood up, walked across to the window, and answered him dully.

'It's gone,' I said. 'I had it locked here in the old wine cabinet. When I came down this morning I found the doors still locked but the picture gone.'

He seemed on the verge of a complete collapse as he stood there swaying.

'Gone,' he repeated in a far-away voice. 'Gone.' Then:

'It's that painting that's caused it all, Mr Hampstead. It's a net, a spider-web that has entangled me and brought me under her power. Since I have finished it I can not help myself. I almost succumbed last night. She was beautiful. God, how beautiful! But when I think of the condition of my arm—'

'Your arm?' I repeated. 'What do you mean?'

He stared at me a moment as if hesitant to say anything further. Then, abruptly, he slipped out of his coat and pulled back the sleeve of his shirt.

'I haven't been to a doctor yet,' he said slowly. 'But I know medicines won't be able to do anything for me. This - this is not a physical ailment.'

I took a step closer and then suddenly recoiled.

'Good God!' I whispered. 'Not a physical ailment? Are you mad?'

From the elbow down, the flesh of the right arm was a horrible blackened mass, with the veins standing in livid prominence and the hand shriveled as in the last stages of gangrene.

'But Peter - yesterday!' I began in a trembling voice.

He nodded lifelessly.

'Yesterday,' he replied, 'that arm was all right. I found it this way when I awoke in bed this morning. Mr Hampstead, don't you realize what we're up against? Don't you realize what it all means?'

I reached for the brandy glass and drank a little with shaking lips.

'Am I going mad, Peter?' I asked finally. 'Are we both mad? None of it seems possible - like some strange dream that has become a reality.'

Woodley turned abruptly and strode across to the wall of bookshelves on the farther side of the room. There he ran his

eyes slowly along the stacked array of ancient volumes. At length he chose one and returned with it to the desk.

'I was here yesterday morning when you were still in bed,' he explained. 'I knew I could find what I was looking for in your library, and I wanted to verify my suspicions. Mr Hampstead, when you read this, you must believe. You must help me. Together perhaps we can free ourselves.'

The volume he had laid on the desk before me was significant in itself. It was a copy of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, that evil work long ago banned by God-fearing people as being inspired by Satan. Up to that moment I had never been aware that it existed in my library, but from the signature on the fly-leaf I saw it must have come into my ownership as part of the collection of Lemuel Hampstead, my ancestor of the Eighteenth Century. Woodley now opened it to a middle page, and bending lower, I read:

And Neptune and Terra had three daughters. And their names were Celaeno, Aello, and Ocypete. But theye were offspring accursed, for theye were winged monsters with the face of a woman and the bodys of vultures. Theye emitted an infectious smell and spoiled whatever theye touched bye their filth. Theye were harpies!

With a choking cry I kicked back my chair and leaped to my feet. 'Harpies!' I screamed. 'God in heaven!'

Harpies! Those fabulous monsters, creatures of evil who delighted in carrying mortals from this earth to hell and everlasting torture! Harpies, winged horrors of classic mythology, sometimes with the face of a hag, sometimes with the body and face of a beautiful woman! Was it possible such fantasies were more than the mental creations of Grecian philosophers and actually existed in our own mundane world?

In a swirl of confusion the pieces of the mystery were beginning to take position in my brain. One thing I saw. Alone among my ancestors, Lemuel Hampstead had sensed the hideous danger that lurked in that ancient marsh, and under guise of keeping the frogs out of the manor grounds had erected a protecting wall. I recalled the faded passage I had read in his memoirs:

The wall will be blessed by the church, and there will be a Holie Bible sealed in each corner poste . . .

Now I understood why the two manor residents previous to Lemuel Hampstead, Charles Ulrich and his wife, Lenore, had come to such dark and horrible ends, the woman dying from 'a strange maladie whiche caused her face and hands to blacken and rot away,' and the body of the man 'to be found in the depths of the slough with his eyes torn from their sockets and his head slashed with the mark of claws.'

An idea struck me, and I whirled upon Peter Woodley. 'Classilda Haven!' I cried. 'Classilda Haven, it is she—'

He nodded. 'I've suspected so for a long time,' he said. 'But there are two more. Always three. They are the spirit of the storm winds. Their homing-place is said to be in Crete, but they can move about the world with the speed of light. They are the personification of classic evil, created perhaps by mass mental imagery long ago and still existing, a throw-back from another age.'

'Classilda!' I repeated dazedly. 'I'm going to her cottage and—'

Woodley shook his head slowly. 'You wouldn't find her now,' he said. 'But even if you did, nothing can harm them while in human form. No, we must wait.' He turned on his heel, left the room a moment and returned with a long tube of rolled canvas. Opening it and removing its contents, I saw that he was holding the long bow and arrow which I had seen him working on in the grounds the day before.

'They're finished, sir,' he said; 'the only method I know of fighting them. A bow and an arrow with a silver head. I've made two arrows. What good they'd do even if they struck, I don't know. But we can try.'

For a moment as the clock pounded its ticks through the silence of the room we sat staring at each other. Woodley's face was tight and drawn, his eyes were glassy, his hands shaking.

'Tonight,' he said suddenly, 'in a few hours the horror will begin. God help us!'

Midnight, and the wind was screaming over the grounds with the mournful whine of an Eolian harp. I lay stretched at

full length in a clump of underbrush, waiting . . . waiting for I knew not what. At my side, within arm's reach, lay Woodley's bow and his two silver-headed arrows. In my pocket was a metal bottle with the crucifix emblazoned on its sides.

There was water in that bottle, holy water from the little church in Royalton, obtained by Woodley early in the afternoon as part of our feeble and blind defense. What its Christian effect would be against these nightmares of another theology I did not know, but in case of any emergency I meant to use it.

We had made hurried plans there in my study before darkness closed in. Woodley was to remain in the Tower, all lights turned off, while I, armed with those strange weapons, kept watch near the wall. Not unless I called out for help was he to show himself, and then only with the utmost caution. I had argued hard before Woodley grudgingly consented to this arrangement.

'It's youth they want, Peter,' I told him. 'They want you because you're young. They care nothing about me. I'm a middle-aged man with a life half spent.'

Time snailed by as I crouched there. Up above, the moon shone at intervals through rents in a flotilla of velvet clouds.

And then the garden door of the Tower creaked open, and I saw Peter Woodley step out and advance down the path. He had removed his hat and coat, and his face shone white as death.

Unable to understand his appearance, I hissed a warning at him there in the shadows.

'You fool!' I cried. 'Go back! I didn't call.'

My words had no effect. Slowly, stiffly, with the same mechanical sleep-walking pace that had marked his entrance to the grounds the night the harpy-woman wrote her name in chalk, he passed me and continued parallel to the wall. Straight to the iron gate-door he moved, then stopped motionless.

'Celaeno!' he called softly. 'Where are you?'

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the moaning of the wind. Then mounting into the night air, wavering and hideous, came once again that wailing scream. From the other side of the frog wall it sounded, rushing nearer.

An instant later I had leaped to my feet and was staring above me. In the gloom, high over the manor grounds, circled

that mighty shape – a giant, vulture-like bird with great pointed black wings *and the head and breast of a woman. A harpy!*

I watched it hover there, carried back and forth by the raging wind. Then my eyes turned farther to the left, and I jerked back with a shriek of horror. There were two more of the loathsome creatures, and those two were swooping down straight toward me.

I caught a glimpse of female faces with exquisite features, long, streaming black hair and crimson, evil lips. Then a sharp claw ripped across my chest and tore my coat. I struck out madly, felt my fists pound deep into the feathery wings, struck again and went down, overwhelmed by their bodies.

I fought with every ounce of strength I possessed, with terror striking deep into my very soul. I rolled over and over, sought frantically to free my right hand and draw forth the bottle of holy water.

A stench of death and decay seared into my nostrils. My face and body were bleeding from a hundred places, and I was fast losing my strength. But suddenly one of those razor claws yielded to my frenzied blows and with a lunge I whipped my hand sideward, grasped the bottle, uncorked its spout and showered the water out before me.

The harpies leaped back and stood gazing at me, women faces twisted in expressions of stark hate. Again I whirled the bottle, this time spilling part of the contents into their eyes.

There was a double shriek of rage. The monsters ran clumsily backward, then swooped into the air and fled.

I leaned gasping against the trunk of a tree. Then as the realization that the horror still was not finished filtered into my bewildered senses, I turned, seized the bow and silver-headed arrows and ran on into the grounds.

Near the end of the property, far beyond the gate, I saw them again. They were flying high above me, three huge shapes etched black against the moonlit sky. And in the claws of one of them, held by his hair, dangled the body of Peter Woodley.

With shaking hands I fitted an arrow to the bow-string and pointed it upward. Back until the bow was bent almost double I pulled, then released it. It whined upward, shot past one of the monsters – and missed.

Panting, mumbling a prayer aloud, I seized the second shaft and made ready to fire again. But the harpies had sensed their danger, ceased their circling and with enraged cries were heading high toward the frog wall and the distant marsh.

I gave a last frenzied look above me, took quick aim and let fly that last arrow. Upward it sped, a gleaming streak in the moonlight.

And suddenly the night was hideous with the cries and shrieks of the wounded monster. The creature fluttered and spun like a top. It opened its claws as it wobbled off toward the marsh, and the body of Woodley, released, dropped downward, fell like a meteor straight onto the jagged top of the frog wall.

An instant later I was at the boy's side, bending over his broken and blood-covered body. He rose up as I lifted his head in my arms.

'Thanks, Mr Hampstead,' he whispered. 'It was - it was the only way.'

He fell back with a sigh, and I was alone with the corpse of Peter Woodley.

There is little more to tell. No one believes me. The villagers stare curiously at my whitened hair and shrink away shuddering as I meet their gaze. The district doctor feels of my pulse, looks into the cornea of my eye and shakes his head perplexedly. And the police continue to search the countryside for some trace of Classilda Haven.

Fools! I have taken them to the gardener's cottage and shown them the empty black silk dress, nailed as it is to the center of the floor by a silver-headed arrow. I have led them to that section of the frog wall near the iron gate-door and traced slowly, letter for letter, the faint, almost obliterated lines that one moonlit night spelt so clearly the word 'Celaeno'. And I have placed on the table the wall mirror and Woodley's painting, which had been found somewhere in the depths of the marsh - placed them at their proper angles and pointed out the strange woman face that looked back silently from the changed perspective.

But in each case they only look at me sadly and murmur: 'Poor man, there is nothing there.'

TOMB OF TERROR

The shadowy mass of the mausoleum rose like a curtain before me. I steadied myself, reached up and strove to see the interior. My curiosity was disappointed. And then – my head jerked back with revulsion. Sweeping to my nostrils from the inner recesses of that vault had come a horrible fetid smell, a loathsome odour of unutterable filth. Then, without warning something cold and clammy slid across my hands clenched there on the iron bars, and I whipped them away dripping with blood, gashed to the bone...

Just a tormenting taste of the blood-blanching horror that awaits you in this classic collection of terror tales.

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